ABSTRACT

Theism and the Justification of First Principles
in Thomas Reid's Epistemology

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The role of theism in Thomas Reid's epistemology remains an unresolved question. Opinions range from outright denials that theism has any relevance to Reid's epistemology to claims that Reid's epistemology depends upon theism in a dogmatic or a viciously circular manner. This dissertation attempts to bring some order to this interpretive fray by answering the following question: What role or roles does theism play in Reid's epistemology, particularly in relation to the epistemic justification of first principles?

Chapters 2-4 lay the foundation for answering this question and clarify some terminology. Chapter 2 distinguishes key senses in which Reid uses the terms "principle" and "first principle." Chapter 3 argues for a novel interpretation of common sense and the principles of common sense. This interpretation avoids a number of objections to Reid's principles of common sense. Chapter 4 considers the initial externalist justification of Reid's first principles. It shows Reid has a surprisingly well-developed proper-functionalism and brings to light several overlooked elements of his epistemology.

Chapters 5-8 argue theism can and does play various important and philosophically respectable roles in Reid's epistemology, particularly in relation to the justification of first principles. Chapter 5 argues that even on the standard foundationalist interpretation of Reid's epistemology, theism can and does boost the justification of first principles. Chapter 6 shows Reid's epistemology is not a form of simple foundationalism but contains coherentist elements. This enables theism further to boost the justification of first principles. Chapter 7 reveals that Reid's epistemology contains different kinds or levels of knowledge, and shows that theism enables the highest form of knowledge, which I call *scientia*. Chapter 8 argues that within Reid's epistemology theism helps protect and preserve the justification of first principles.

Theism and the Justification of First Principles
in Thomas Reid's Epistemology

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Philosophy

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of

Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Todd Buras for his patience, encouragement, availability, and excellent suggestions and criticisms as I have worked on this lengthy project. I thank Mike Beaty, Steve Evans, Alex Pruss, and William Weaver for serving on my committee and for their helpful feedback and suggestions. I am indebted to the faculty and graduate students of Baylor University's Philosophy Department for their friendship, encouragement, constructive criticisms, insights, and many, many conversations during the past six years, especially as I have worked on this project. It has been a warm and fruitful community for me to learn and grow as a philosopher. Finally, I owe an immense debt to my wife, Bethany, who has patiently born with me and supported me during this long endeavor.

To Bethany

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The epistemology of the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid (1710-96) has considerable merit and abiding significance. This is perhaps especially the case for Christian epistemologists, who have found his writings a source of inspiration.[1] I will not, however, here focus on assessing the merits or correctness of Reid's epistemology. This is a dissertation in the history of philosophy. Its main concern is interpretative, but it also contributes to our understanding of the important roles theism can play in an epistemology that, like Reid's, is proper functionalist and generally foundationalist. For Christians and theists who find such an epistemology appealing, this dissertation will have far more than merely historical interest.

The role of theism in Reid's epistemology remains an unresolved question. At one end of the spectrum, many commentators deny theism has any role, much less a significant one. James Somerville, for instance, claims that "Reid's talk of God" should be understood as "amounting to no more than pious reminders for the faithful. . . . [T]he various mentionings of God throughout his works generally . . . have virtually no philosophical and certainly no epistemological significance."[2] In short, "Reid's

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[1] Alvin Plantinga's Reid-inspired epistemology is a particularly prominent and influential example of Reid's impact on Christian epistemologists. See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[2] James Somerville, *The Enigmatic Parting Shot: What Was Hume's "Compleat Answer to Dr Reid and to That Bigotted Silly Fellow, Beattie"?* (Aldershot: Avebury Press, 1995), 347.

platitudinous pieties . . . have no relevance to his philosophy."[3] D. D. Todd queries, "Well, what are we to make of all those tedious and inconvenient invocations of God that are scattered about Reid's works?" Todd responds that while they may serve various rhetorical purposes, "The straightforward fact of the matter is that every reference to God in Reid's writings can be excised without diminishing his philosophy a significant whit."[4] At the other end of the spectrum, many commentators claim Reid's epistemology depends upon his theism in a philosophically problematic fashion. For example, according to Norman Daniels, "Reid's only defense against the skeptical outcome of his own nativism—namely, that our constitutions might lead us to systematically false beliefs—is his belief that God would not deceive us. . . . Reid justifies natively given 'common sense' beliefs through a dogmatic appeal to God as a nondeceiver."[5] While a few interpreters fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum,[6] most fall near one end or the other.

I will attempt to bring some order to this interpretive fray by answering the following question: What role or roles does theism play in Reid's epistemology, particularly in relation to the epistemic justification of first principles? Chapters 2-4 lay the foundation for answering this question. They clarify what Reid means by first principles, how he understands the first principles of common sense, and why first

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[3] James Somerville, "Reid's Conception of Common Sense," *The Monist* 70, no. 4 (1987): 425.

[4] D. D. Todd, "An Inquiry into Thomas Reid," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 39, no. 2 (2000): 387.

[5] Norman Daniels, *Thomas Reid's Inquiry: The Geometry of Visibles and the Case for Realism* (New York: Burt Franklin & Co., 1974), 117, 119–120.

[6] See, for example, Derek R. Brookes, "Introduction," in *An Inquiry into the Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, by Thomas Reid, ed. Derek R. Brookes (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), xxi–xxiii; Christopher Hookway, *Scepticism* (London: Routledge, 1990), 116–119.

principles typically enjoy epistemic justification. While chapters 2-4 are background to the main argument of this dissertation, they also establish numerous substantive interpretive points. The subject of each of these chapters deserves a dissertation of its own, for the literature on these topics remains very undeveloped. These chapters advance the relevant literature through their detailed and fairly extensive treatment of each topic. Chapters 5-8 argue theism can and does play various important and philosophically respectable roles in Reid's epistemology, particularly in relation to the justification of first principles. Theism boosts the justification of first principles (chapters 5-6), allows for a special kind or level of knowledge which I call *scientia* (chapter 7), and helps protect and preserve the justification of first principles (chapter 8).

Chapter 2 distinguishes and clarifies some key senses in which Reid uses the terms "principle" and "first principle" and shows how they are related. These important distinctions and clarifications both reveal common misinterpretations of Reid and make it possible to avoid them. This chapter begins to provide the framework within which to understand the role of theism in Reid's epistemology.

Common sense and the first principles of common sense play an important role in Reid's epistemology. Building on the distinctions and framework of chapter 1, chapter 2 argues for and develops a novel and illuminating account of common sense and its principles. I show that common sense is a faculty and has two distinct though related functions. It is responsible for judging of self-evident truths, and it is also responsible for the acquisition of many of our distinct concepts. This latter conceptual function of common sense has been entirely overlooked in the literature. I argue that Reid has a dual understanding of the principles of common sense and I show how my account answers a

number of objections to Reid's principles of common sense. My account of the self-evidence of the principles of common sense in particular provides important background for part of my argument in chapter 7.

Chapter 4 develops an account of the initial justification possessed by first principles. This account provides the material for my response in chapter 5 to two of the mistaken views regarding the role of theism in Reid's epistemology, and it also provides the framework for understanding the roles theism can and does play in relation to the justification of first principles. While others have claimed that Reid has a proper-functionalist epistemology, my proper-functionalist interpretation is far more comprehensive, textually supported, and detailed than any in the literature. I show that Reid has a surprisingly well-developed proper functionalist epistemology with four key components. I also bring to light several overlooked elements of Reid's epistemology. These include the ways that many non-intellectual faculties are, at least in a derivative sense, truth-directed; Reid's account of the truth-directedness of acquired perceptions; the significant role that virtues play in Reid's epistemology; and Reid's highly developed understanding of defeaters.

Chapters 5 and 6 argue that theism boosts the justification of first principles. Chapter 5 argues this is possible even on the standard foundationalist interpretation of Reid's epistemology. Chapter 6 argues that Reid's epistemology is not a form of simple foundationalism and shows how this enables theism to play additional justificatory roles.

After showing that the main views regarding the role of theism in Reid's epistemology are less than satisfactory, chapter 5 defends what is perhaps the most fundamental thesis of this dissertation: in Reid's epistemology, it is possible to boost the

justification of first principles. The nearly universal consensus of Reid scholars who have addressed this topic is that Reid's first principles do not admit of such justification-boosting. I call this claim the No Justification Boosting Thesis. Responding to this thesis is crucial. If the thesis is correct, it follows that theism cannot boost the justification of first principles, and my arguments in chapters 5, 6, and to some extent 7 are mistaken. I show that the No Justification Boosting Thesis is false and that Reid rejected it. I then show that even on the standard foundationalist interpretation of Reid's epistemology, theism can and does boost the justification of first principles, including first principles of common sense concerned with the reliability of our faculties.

Chapter 6 argues against the standard interpretation of Reid's epistemology, according to which he is a simple foundationalist. Reid's epistemology is plausibly understood as containing coherentist strands. While coherence is not the primary or initial source of justification, coherence does generate justification. Revealing the coherentist elements of Reid's epistemology shows additional ways that theism boosts the justification of first principles, and it enables us to make sense of some otherwise difficult passages where Reid makes substantive epistemic appeals to God.

Chapter 7 represents a significant and new direction of development in the literature on Reid. I reveal several important distinctions in Reid's epistemology, most of which have been entirely overlooked. I not only show that Reid's epistemology contains different kinds or levels of knowledge, but that it contains no less than four different levels of knowledge. Moreover, knowledge at either of the lower two levels can be upgraded to one of the higher levels. The highest level of knowledge, which I call *scientia*, depends upon theism. While *scientia* globally boosts the justification of first

principles, its epistemic value goes far beyond this justificatory role. In this chapter I also show that Reid's epistemology contains a distinction between two very different kinds of evidence, and I briefly develop an account of each. My distinction between two notions of evidence explains the key difference between the two lower and the two higher levels of knowledge, and it accounts for how knowledge can be upgraded by acquiring a new kind of evidence.

Chapter 8 considers whether theism can play a role in Reid's epistemology similar to the role it plays in Alvin Plantinga's Reid-inspired epistemology.[7] Very roughly, according to Plantinga atheism generates devastating and global defeaters for reflective atheists. Theism, by contrast, protects its adherents from such defeaters, which never arise for them in the first place. Might theism play such a Plantinga-style role in Reid's epistemology by protecting knowledge from defeaters? Among those who have considered this question, the consensus is that theism not only does not but cannot play such a role. Philip de Bary in particular argues at length that Reid could not accept Plantinga's position.[8] I argue in response that Plantinga's key arguments are acceptable for Reid and that Reid could and plausibly would accept Plantinga's claims regarding the epistemic value of theism. I further argue there is good textual evidence that Reid actually *did* hold a position very similar to Plantinga's. In Reid's epistemology, theism, unlike atheism, provides a perspective within which certain kinds of skeptical worries and defeaters will never arise in the first place. In this way theism helps protect and preserve the justification of first principles.

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[7] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, chapter 12; Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 10.

[8] Philip de Bary, *Thomas Reid and Scepticism: His Reliabilist Response* (Routledge, 2002), chapter 10.

CHAPTER TWO

Reid on Principles and First Principles

Understanding theism's role in relation to the justification of Reid's first principles requires first understanding the nature of his first principles. Clarifying what Reid means by principles and first principles—or more accurately, the various things he means by these phrases—also provides part of the framework of his epistemology, and hence part of the background for understanding the roles theism plays within it. In addition to providing background for my later arguments, this chapter begins to answer some interpretive questions that deserve a dissertation-length treatment of their own. My detailed treatment of these topics advances the relatively undeveloped literature on them.

Reid's epistemology is complicated by his use of the terms "principle," "first principle," and "first principle of common sense." Reid uses each of these key terms in several distinct senses without clearly distinguishing them. Reid's frequent abbreviation of terms further complicates matters. Not only does Reid use "first principle of common sense" in distinct senses, but for each sense he frequently uses the shorthand phrase "first principle" or simply "principle." Likewise, "principle" is often shorthand for "first principle" in each of its senses. Finally, "principle" has several distinct senses of its own. Unsurprisingly, Reid's confusing terminology has frequently led commentators to misinterpret him, and it has resulted in some of his passages being not only confusing but confused. Distinguishing the senses in which Reid uses these terms makes it possible to avoid such misinterpretations.

This chapter distinguishes and clarifies some of the key senses in which Reid uses the terms "principle" and "first principle." It focuses on the senses particularly important for his epistemology and on their relation to one another. Chapter 3 draws from and builds on these distinctions to establish what Reid means by common sense and the principles of common sense.[1]

1. Principles

I will show that Reid uses the term "principle" in three main senses.[2] First, he uses it to refer to laws—laws that govern the operations of body, mind, and the interactions between body and mind. Of particular concern for our purposes are those laws governing human thought and action. Because these are laws of our constitution, I will refer to them as *constitutional principles*. Second, Reid uses "principle" to refer to those general descriptions of laws that are foundational to a science, such as the science of the human mind. I will call these *scientific principles*. Finally, Reid uses "principle" to refer to things that we believe. In Reid's epistemology these three senses of principle are

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[1] When citing Reid's major works, I will use the following format. For the *Inquiry*, the chapter and section numbers will be given as a capital Roman numeral followed by a lowercase Roman numeral, and the page number of the critical edition will then be given in Arabic numerals. For instance, "*Inquiry*, I.ii, 15," refers to chapter I, section ii, page 15 of the *Inquiry*. For the *Intellectual Powers* (*IP*) and the *Active Powers* (*AP*), the essay and chapter numbers will be given as a capital Roman numeral followed by a lowercase Roman numeral, and the page number of the critical edition will then be given in Arabic numerals. For instance, "*AP*, I.ii, 13," refers to essay I, chapter ii, page 13 of the *Active Powers*. Essay III of the *Active Powers* is divided into three parts, each with its own chapters. I will refer to these parts in the following fashion: *AP*, III.pt 2.iii, 107.

[2] Reid sometimes uses "principle" in various other senses, many of which are metaphysical. For example, he speaks of humans (and sometimes animals) as having a "thinking principle," which he seems to understand as being synonymous with "mind," "soul," and "myself" (Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. Derek R. Brookes (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), Preface, 12; I.i, 20; I.ii, 42; Thomas Reid, *Thomas Reid on Practical Ethics: Lectures and Papers on Natural Religion, Self-Government, Natural Jurisprudence and the Law of Nations*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 5). Reid also uses "principle" in the sense of "the principle of life" (*IP*, I.iii, 47) and as synonymous with "cause" (*IP*, IV.ii, 315; V.ii, 316).

related. The study of how we know things involves *scientific principles*, and in particular scientific principles describing our *constitutional principles*, or those laws responsible for us believing *principles*.

1.1. Principles as Laws of our Constitution: Constitutional Principles

As a dualist, Reid maintains the existence of a material reality and a mental reality.[3] Laws govern the operations and changes within material reality, within mental reality, and the interactions between the material and the mental.[4] We might call these physical laws, mental laws, and psycho-physical laws, respectively. While these laws govern various changes, Reid emphasizes they are not, properly speaking, *causes*. Properly speaking, only agents are causes.[5] As Reid writes in an unpublished manuscript,

> When we call the Laws of Nature, Causes and the Phaenomena the Effects of those Causes we speak improperly and unphilosophically for the laws of nature being onely general Rules cannot have any proper Efficiency or Causality. All proper Causation supposes activity, and we have no sufficient reason to believe that there is any real Activity in any part of the material System.[6]

According to Reid, the laws of nature are rules according to which God acts in his governance of his creation.[7] They regulate the orderly changes and connections of events within the world.

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[3] Reid does not claim that mind and body are the only two types of reality, but rather that these are the only two we do or can know of. See Reid, *IP*, "Preface," 11–12.

[4] See, for example, Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Derek R. Brookes (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), VI.xxii, 122.

[5] Reid does, however, note that we sometimes speak of events as causes (Ibid., VI.xxi, 122).

[6] Thomas Reid, *Thomas Reid on Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts: Papers on the Culture of the Mind*, ed. Alexander Broadie (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 182 (AUL MS 2131/4/I/23).

[7] Reid, *IP*, VII.iii, 560; see also Reid, *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 50 (AUL MS 2131/4/I/30).

Reid frequently refers to the laws according to which the animate creation functions as *principles*, often with a qualifier such as principles *of our constitution*, or principles *of human nature*. To distinguish these kinds of principles from others, I will call them *constitutional principles*.

The principles of our constitution regulate various aspects of our life. For example, according to Reid there are various constitutional principles *of action* which regulate our behavior.[8] Mechanical principles of action, for instance, include instincts that regulate breathing and instinctive blinking in response to an object moving suddenly toward the eye. These mechanical principles regulate our actions without any attention or act of will on our part.

Other constitutional principles regulate our mental life by relating mental events. We might call these *mental constitutional principles*. These principles, or laws, of our constitution regulate our mental life in a manner similar to the way physical laws regulate the physical world.[9] When, for example, we experience a sensation corresponding to hardness, this triggers, according to the laws of our constitution, the conception of a hard object and the belief in its present existence. Particularly important for our purposes are those principles that regulate belief. Reid does not give these a name, but let us call them *doxastic principles* of our constitution. As a result of doxastic principles, certain mental inputs, such as sensations, trigger certain beliefs. For example, regarding tactile perception, Reid writes, "by an original principle of our constitution, a certain sensation of touch both suggests to the mind the conception of hardness, and creates the belief of

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[8] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, ed. Knud Haakonssen and James A. Harris (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), III.pt 1.i, 78.

[9] Though unlike physical laws, we can resist some of the mental constitutional principles, as least for a time. This is discussed below.

it."[10] As this passage indicates, doxastic principles are often combined with what we might call *conceptual principles*. These are principles according to which certain inputs—in the above the example, a sensation—suggest certain conceptions, such as of hardness. For Reid, perception—the conception of an externally existing object and the belief in its present existence, generally triggered by a sensation[11]—is the result of a principle that is both conceptual and doxastic.[12] In the tactile perception of a hard object, for example, the sensation of the hard object produces, according to the principles of our constitution, both the conception of a hard object and the belief in its present existence.

Reid makes an important distinction between what I will call *original* and *acquired* constitutional principles, borrowing my terminology from his distinction between original and acquired perception. Original (or sometimes "natural"[13]) principles are fundamental laws of our constitution. They are not resolvable into more general principles, and unlike acquired principles, they are not products of "habit, experience, [or] education."[14] While innate, they may not appear until a certain stage of development.

Reid distinguishes between what I am calling original and acquired principles at various places in his writings. For example, in his discussion of the mechanical principles

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[10] Reid, *Inquiry*, V.ii, 58.

[11] Reid does not think that sensations are a necessary constituent of perception (*Inquiry*, VI.xxi, 176). Given our constitution, however, original perception always involves a sensation triggering a conception and belief. Or at least, almost always, for visible figure may provide one exception (see *Inquiry*, VI.xxi, 176, and VI.viii). In acquired perception, "the signs are either sensations, or the things which we perceive by means of sensation" (*Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 191; see also *IP*, II.xxi, 237).

[12] Reid generally speaks as if one principle, which is both conceptual and doxastic, is responsible for any given perceptions. It might, however, be that two principles, one conceptual and the other doxastic, are responsible for any given perception. This issue of counting and distinguishing principles is not, however, here relevant.

[13] See, for example, *IP*, II.xxii, 247, and *Inquiry*, II.vii, 38.

[14] Reid, *Inquiry*, V.iii, 61.

of action, he distinguishes between instincts (original principles) and habits (acquired principles): "Habit differs from instinct, not in its nature, but in its origin; the latter being natural, the former acquired."[15] I will focus, however, on the distinction between original and acquired constitutional principles in Reid's discussion of perception. This is where Reid most clearly develops this distinction, and it provides important background to his epistemology.

In perception, the conception of an external object and the belief in its present existence are "suggested" by a "sign." *Suggestion* refers to the way that certain signs produce in us, according the principles of our constitution and thus in an immediate and non-inferential fashion, various concepts and beliefs:

> How a sensation should instantly make us conceive and believe the existence of an external thing altogether unlike to it, I do not pretend to know; and when I say that the one suggests the other, I mean not to explain the manner of their connection, but to express a fact, which every one may be conscious of; namely, that, by a law of our nature, such a conception and belief constantly and immediately follow the sensation.[16]

A *sign* is simply any stimulant or input that, according to our perceptual (conceptual and doxastic) principles, suggests, or produces, a conception and belief. Reid uses human language to illustrate how this process of suggestion works. When competent English speakers read or hear the noun "gold," this word serves as a sign that suggests the concept of gold—say, a yellow precious metal. Significantly, "The word *gold* has no similitude to the substance signified by it; nor is it in its own nature more fit to signify this than any other substance."[17] The connection between the word and what it signifies is

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[15] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 1.iii, 88.

[16] Reid, *Inquiry*, V.viii, 74.

[17] Ibid., V.iii, 58.

entirely contingent. The mind therefore does not, and indeed cannot, pass from the word to the concept of the substance signified by it via any inference from the mere sign. The connection must be learned "by habit and custom." But once it is learned, the mind immediately moves from a particular instance of the word "gold" to the concept of gold. The word suggests the concept. In a similar manner, all perception involves a sign suggesting both a conception of some external object and a belief in its present existence.

According to Reid,

> [T]here are two things necessary to our knowing things by means of signs. First, That a real connection between the sign and the thing signified be established, either by the course of nature, or by the will of and appointment of men. When they are connected by the course of nature, it is a natural sign; when by human appointment, it is an artificial sign. . . .
>
> Another requisite to our knowing things by signs is, that the appearance of the sign to the mind, be followed by the conception and belief of the thing signified. Without this the sign is not understood or interpreted; and therefore is no sign to us, however fit in its own nature for that purpose.[18]

For perception to work properly, there must be a "real connection" between the sign and that which it signifies. That is, the sign must be a reliable indicator of what it signifies. If this connection between a sign and that which it signifies is established by nature, then the sign is a *natural sign* of that which it signifies. Thus, "smoke is a natural sign of fire," and "certain features are natural signs of anger."[19] *Artificial signs*, by contrast, are connected to that which they signify by human convention. Words, for example, are artificial signs of concepts. In addition to a real connection between a sign and that which it signifies, there must also be a mental connection such that the sign suggests to a perceiver "the conception and belief of the thing signified." This mental connection may

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[18] Ibid., VI.xxi, 177.

[19] Ibid.

be either original or acquired, based on whether it is innate or learned. Corresponding to these two types of connections, Reid distinguishes original and acquired perceptions.

In *original perception*, the mental connection between a sign and that which it signifies is unlearned and not based on experience. It is a fundamental connection based on our original constitution, and not reducible to other principles.[20] Reid writes,

> 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 creates the belief of it.[21]

In original perception, the sign is a sensation, and it is always a natural sign of that which it signifies.[22] According to Reid,

> Our original perceptions . . . must be resolved into *particular* principles of the human constitution. Thus, it is . . . by one particular principle of our constitution, that a certain sensation signifies hardness in the body which I handle; and it is by another particular principle, that a certain sensation signifies motion in that body.[23]

Reid does not tell us what he means by particular principles. A good way to understand the distinction is that particular principles connect particular input types with particular output types. The principles governing original perceptions are particular in that they connect particular sensation-types with particular perception-types.[24] For example, in tactile perceptions of hard objects, certain types of tactile sensations produce the

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[20] Ibid., V.iii 60, 61; V.iv, 62.

[21] Ibid., VI.xxiv, 190.

[22] Reid repeats the claim that all the signs in original perceptions are sensations in *IP*, II.xxi, 237. However, some passages indicate that the signs in some original perceptions are not sensations. See *Inquiry*, II.vii, 38; VI.xxiv, 191; *IP*, II.xxi, 237; VI.v, 484.

[23] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 191, emphasis added.

[24] Todd Buras, "The Function of Sensations in Reid," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47, no. 3 (2009): 344.

perception of hardness. This occurs through the operation of an original and particular principle of our constitution.

In *acquired perception*, the mental connection between the sign and that which it signifies is learned through experience. It should be noted that the connection is acquired in the sense of being learned, and *not* in the sense that it did not exist at one time and then existed at some later time. In this latter sense, original perceptions—and more broadly, original constitutional principles—may be acquired, for they may require a certain level of human development and maturity for expression. For example, according to Reid conscience is not only an active power of the mind—one that incites humans to action—but also an original intellectual power, for it "furnishes the human mind with many of its original conceptions or ideas, as well as with the first principles of many important branches of human knowledge."[25] But as Reid notes, conscience requires a certain level of development: "[B]y an original power of the mind, when we come to years of understanding and reflection, we not only have the notions of right and wrong in conduct, but perceive certain things to be right, and others to be wrong."[26] Not only do various faculties require a certain level of development, but they themselves develop or "unfold themselves by degrees":

> Perhaps a child in the womb, or for some short period of its existence, is merely a sentient being: the faculties, by which it perceives an external world, by which it reflects on its own thoughts, and existence, and relation to other things, as well as its reasoning and moral faculties, unfold themselves by degrees; so that it is

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[25] Reid, *Inquiry*, III.viii, 195.

[26] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 3.vi, 175. Reid is here using "perceive" in a loose, analogical sense. Based on his proper definition, perception regards the present existence of external objects.

> inspired with the various principles of common sense, as with the passions of love and resentment, when it has occasion for them.[27]

Original perceptions—and more broadly, original principles—may be acquired in the sense that they appear only at a certain stage of development. But they are not, in Reid's terminology, acquired perceptions or acquired principles. These are learned or taught through experience.

Acquired perceptions—and more broadly, acquired constitutional principles—are acquired through experience in conjunction with certain *general* principles. As Reid puts it,

> Nature is frugal in her operations, and will not be at the expence of a particular instinct, to give us that knowledge which experience will soon produce, by means of a general principle of human nature.
>
> For a little experience, by the constitution of human nature, ties together, not only in our imagination, but in our belief, those things which were in their nature unconnected. When I hear a certain sound, I conclude immediately, without reasoning, that a coach passes by. There are no premises from which this connection is inferred by any rules of logic. It is the effect of a principle of our nature, common to us with the brutes.[28]

While Reid does not explain what he means by *general* principles, they seem to be general in that they do not connect specific types of inputs, or signs, with specific beliefs or belief-types. They are principles of association, and they can connect whatever we have experienced as connected. They can be thought of as having the form *whatever is* x *is* y. As a result of one type of experience being connected with another type of experience—say, experiencing certain sounds connected with coaches passing—a general principle of our constitution forms a mental association between these two experience types, such that experiences of type *x* now trigger beliefs of type *y*. This new mental

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[27] Reid, *Inquiry*, V.vii, 72.

[28] Ibid., IV.i, 50.

association is an acquired *particular* principle of our constitution: it connects particular input types with particular output types. As a result of this association—that is, this acquired constitutional principle—the sound of a coach passing now triggers in us the belief that a coach is passing. We have acquired the auditory perception of passing coaches.

An important example of a general principle is what Reid calls *the inductive principle*:

> [W]hen we have found two things to have been constantly conjoined in the course of nature, the appearance of one of them is immediately followed by the conception and belief of the other. The former becomes a natural sign of the later. . . . [T]he appearance of one, without any reasoning or reflection, carries along with it the belief of the other.[29]

The inductive principle is important in coming to perceive via one sense what is originally perceived via another. For example, by experiencing the constant conjunction of certain visual appearances of objects with the tactile perception that those objects are hard, we form a mental connection between those visual appearances and the belief that the object is hard. I am calling this mental connection an *acquired (constitutional) principle*, or as Reid at one point calls it, "a second nature."[30] As a result of this acquired principle, we can visually perceive that objects are hard: the visual appearance characteristic of hard objects now suggests in us the belief in the present existence of a hard object.

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[29] Ibid., VI.xxiv, 195–196, 199. By "The former becomes a natural sign of the later," Reid means that the former becomes a natural sign *to the observer*. Prior to this time, there was still a connection between the "sign" and that which it "signified" due to their natural connection, and hence the sign was already a natural sign, speaking abstractly.

[30] Reid, *IP*, II.xxi, 236.

While the signs in original perception are sensations,[31] "In acquired perception, the signs are either sensations, or things which we perceive by means of sensations."[32] Thus, for example, when we repeatedly experience smoke conjoined with fire, the inductive principle leads us to associate smoke with fire, and as a result we can perceive fire by perceiving smoke. Through acquired perception we may learn to interpret either natural signs, as in the smoke example, or we may lean to interpret artificial signs, such as words.

According to Reid, "[T]here are three ways in which the mind passes from the appearance of a natural sign to the conception and belief of the thing signified; by original principles of our constitution, by custom, and by reasoning."[33] Only the first two count as perception (original and acquired perception, respectively), for only in these cases does the mind pass immediately and non-inferentially, by a principle of the constitution, from the sign to belief in the thing signified. When the mind passes from the sign to that which it signifies via reasoning, this is not perception. Or at least this is not yet perception, for repeating this line of inference may result in an acquired perceptual principle. As a result, the sign may then non-inferentially trigger a belief in that which it signifies.

All of Reid's original constitutional principles are relative in that they are principles *of certain kinds of beings*. In the first place, they are relative to the *human* constitution:

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[31] See footnote 22 for a qualification to this claim.

[32] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 191. See also *IP*, II.xxi, 237.

[33] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxi, 177.

> Our original perceptions . . . must be resolved into particular principles of the *human* constitution. . . . But our acquired perceptions . . . must be resolved into general principles of the *human* constitution.[34]

Our *original principles* are original principles of the *human* constitution. Some beings have original principles that humans lack, and others lack original principles that humans possess.[35] Original principles are also relative to *properly functioning* humans, for some humans might lack certain principles due to an injury or some congenital disability. Finally, original principles are relative to *stages of human development*. As already mentioned, the original principles of conscience, for example, require a certain level of maturity and development for their appearance. Reid's original constitutional principles, then, are ultimately original principles of properly functioning mature humans.

Acquired constitutional principles exhibit far greater variance than original principles, for they are acquired through the operations of general original principles in conjunction with particular experiences (which are in turn ultimately based on original particular principles). Acquired perception is therefore

> various in different persons according to their different occupations, and the different circumstances in which they are placed. Every artist acquires an eye as well as a hand in his own profession: His eye becomes skilled in perceiving, no less than his hand in executing, what belongs to his employment.[36]

Because of their dependence on experiences, acquired perceptions (and more broadly, acquired principles) are very individual-relative: "a painter perceives, that this picture is the work of Raphael, that the work of Titian; a jeweler, that this is a true diamond, that a

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[34] Ibid., VI.xxiv, 191, emphases added.

[35] Reid writes, for example, "That conscience"—and the principles constitutive of it—"is peculiar to man. We see not a vestige of it in brute-animals" (*AP*, III.pt 3.viii, 189).

[36] Reid, *IP*, II.xxi, 239.

counterfeit; a sailor, that this is a ship of five hundred ton, that of four hundred."[37] Many acquired principles, however, are common. Let us call these *common acquired principles*. They are common because nearly all humans have not only the same general principles, but also many of the same types of experiences. For example, we nearly all have certain visual experiences of objects in conjunction with the tactile perception that they are hard. These types of experiences, conjoined with the operation of the inductive principle, result in us acquiring the principles necessary for acquired visual perception of hardness. As a result, the visual perception of hardness is common to humans, even though it rests on an acquired perceptual principle. Similar to original principles, common acquired principles will be shared by properly functioning mature humans—assuming, that is, that they have had a properly varied set of human experiences.

Acquired principles can be refined and developed, whether through further experiences, more careful attention to our experiences and their contexts, or reflection upon our experiences and the contexts of our experiences.[38] For example, Reid discusses how someone unaccustomed to perceiving objects in heavy fog might at first mistake the appearance of a nearby seagull for a distant man on horseback. Upon further experience of perceiving objects in foggy conditions, his acquired perception may be refined to where he can reliably perceive seagulls and other objects in foggy conditions: "we learn from experience, to make allowance for that variety of constitutions of the air which we have been accustomed to observe, and of which we are aware."[39]

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[37] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 191–192.

[38] See, for example, *IP*, II.xxii.

[39] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxii, 183–184.

In summary, Reid often uses the term *principle* to refer to principles, or laws, of our constitution. These constitutional principles may be either original or acquired. If they are original, they may be either particular or general. If they are acquired, they are acquired through original general principles operating in conjunction with our experiences. Some acquired principles are common. Particularly relevant for our purposes is the fact that many principles are doxastic. Doxastic principles suggest certain beliefs in response to certain signs. These signs may be either natural or artificial.

1.2. Scientific Principles

Reid often uses "principle" to refer to the fundamental truths which ground a science—that is, "a System of Precepts relating to any Object of human Knowledge."[40] I will call these *scientific principles*. For instance, Reid writes, "In all other sciences, as well as in mathematics, it will be found, that there are a few common principles, upon which all the reasonings in that science are grounded, and into which they may be resolved."[41] As we will see in the next chapter, a number of scientific principles are first principles of common sense. They are things we can justifiedly believe as self-evident truths. Significantly, some of these self-evident scientific principles concern our doxastic constitutional principles and hence have epistemological significance.

Some scientific principles are general descriptions of the physical, mental, and psycho-physical laws that regulate reality. That is, some of these principles are propositional representations of "principles" in the sense of laws. For instance, Reid writes, "Are there any principles with regard to the mind, settled with that perspicuity and

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[40] Reid, *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 283 (AUL MS 2131/4/I/20).

[41] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 40.

evidence, which attends the principles of mechanics, astronomy, and optics? These are really sciences, built upon laws of nature which universally obtain."[42] It is important to maintain a clear distinction between principles in the sense of the actual laws that regulate our mind, and principles in the sense of descriptions of these laws. As we will see in the next chapter, Reid sometimes confuses the two, and as a result sometimes his discussions of the principles of common sense are both confusing and confused.

Other scientific principles are general statements or claims that are not descriptions of laws of nature. For instance: "In all other sciences, as well as in mathematics, it will be found, that there are a few common principles, upon which all the reasonings in that science are grounded, and into which they may be resolved." Examples of such principles in mathematics are axioms, "such as, That the whole is greater than a part, That equal quantities added to equal quantities, make equal sums." Reid writes that Sir Isaac Newton established a "solid foundation" in natural philosophy by laying "down the common principles or axioms, on which the reasonings in natural philosophy are built": "They are such as these: That similar effects proceed from the same or similar causes: That we ought to admit of no other causes of natural effects, but such as are true, and sufficient to account for the effects."[43] Scientific principles are general statements or claims, including ones about the laws of nature.

Reid distinguishes at least two types of scientific principles based on the way they are known. First are principles that are "evident in themselves," or self-evident:

> There are . . . common principles, which are the foundation of all reasoning, and of all science. Such common principles seldom admit of direct proof, nor do

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[42] Reid, *Inquiry*, I.iii, 16.

[43] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 40.

> they need it. Men need not to be taught them; for they are such as all men of common understanding know; or such, at least, as they give a ready assent to, as soon as they are proposed and understood.[44]

For those who have reflected upon them, such scientific principles are known immediately and non-inferentially. They are self-evident in the sense that normal adults immediately assent to them as soon as they clearly understand them, and it is in this sense that they are "common principles."[45] I will call these *self-evident scientific principles*. According to Reid, they include various mathematical axioms, such as, "That equal quantities added to equal quantities, make equal sums," as well as various principles of natural philosophy, such as, "That similar effects proceed from the same or similar causes." As we will see, self-evident scientific principles are a subset of the first principles of common sense.[46]

Other scientific principles are arrived at inductively from observing various phenomena. I will call these *inductive scientific principles*:

> As the Principles of Astronomy must be derived by Induction from the knowledge of the Phenomena of the heavenly bodies, so the principles of Pneumatology can onely be derived by Induction from the Phenomena of the

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[44] Ibid., I.ii, 39.

[45] Regarding self-evidence, Reid writes, "Self-evident propositions are those which appear evident to every man of sound understanding who apprehends the meaning of them distinctly, and attends to them without prejudice" (*IP*, II.x, 141–142). This is nearly the same definition that John Locke gives at one point: "Universal and ready assent, upon hearing and understanding the Terms, is (I grant) a mark of self-evidence." However, Locke, unlike Reid, accounts for this immediate consent based on the agreement or disagreement of the ideas in a propositions: "*Knowledge*, as has been shewn, consists in the perception of the agreement or disagreement of *Ideas*: Now where that agreement or disagreement is perceived immediately by it self, without the intervention or help of any other, there our *Knowledge is self-evident*. This will appear to be so to any one, who will but consider any of those Propositions, which, without any proof, he assents to at first sight: for in all of them he will find, that the reason of his Assent, is from that agreement or disagreement, which the Mind, by an immediate comparing them, finds in those *Ideas* answering the Affirmation or Negation in the Proposition" (John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), I.ii.18; IV.vii.2).

[46] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 452. While it is easy to assume that Reid understands the string of terms in this passage as synonyms, this is not correct. They all apply to the principles of common sense, but as I will argue, the principles of common sense are a subset of some of them, such as first principles.

> Mind, that is from Operations which we are conscious of or observe in others. The more extensive our knowledge is of the Operations of the Mind in Arts, in Sciences, in the business of Life in every Stage of the Minds improvement or Degeneracy, the more ample materials we have for acquiring the knowledge of its Powers. All that is farther to be done is to analyse those Operations & to reduce them to principles.[47]

In his understanding of induction, Reid explicitly draws from Bacon and from Newton, whom he sees as developing Bacon's project.[48] Induction relies upon not only the observations of particular phenomena, but also on certain self-evident scientific principles (which are a subset of the principles of common sense). In particular, induction relies upon "the presumption we naturally have of the uniformity of Nature and of its being governed by fixed laws."[49] In one of his manuscripts, under the heading "Inductive Reasoning," Reid writes such reasoning is "[f]ounded partly on Facts observed by our selves or by other person of Credit partly on Certain Maxims of common Sense by which we reason from such facts. The Maxims of Common Sense which we use in Reasoning from facts may I apprehend be all reduced to this One that Nature is governed by fixed Laws."[50] Without the self-evident scientific principle "that Nature is governed by fixed Laws," we could not reason from particular phenomena to a general law of which the observed phenomena are particular instances. As Reid puts it, "This is a principle which

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[47] Thomas Reid, *The Correspondence of Thomas Reid*, ed. Paul Wood (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 212–213 (AUL MS 2131/3/II/3).

[48] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 457.

[49] Reid, *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 183 (AUL MS 2131/4/1/9).

[50] Ibid., 173–174 (AUL MS 2131/4/II/14). Reid immediately proceeds to give various characteristics of this principle that mark it as a principle of common sense.

we securely rely upon in all Cases [of induction] and if it were not true [there] could be no force at all in inductive Reasoning."[51]

1.3. Principles as Things Believed

Reid frequently uses the word "principle" to refer to things that we believe, as in the following passage: "In all rational belief, *the thing believed* is either itself a first principle, or it is by just reasoning deduced from first principles."[52] Reid sometimes calls these things believed "principles of belief":

> *[S]uggestion* [is] . . . a power of the mind . . . to which we owe many of our simple notions which are neither impressions nor ideas, as well as many original *principles of belief* [emphasis added]. . . . We all know, that a certain kind of sound suggests immediately to the mind, a coach passing in the street; and not only produces the imagination, but the belief, that a coach is passing.[53]

Reid's point in this passage is that the power of suggestion creates in us both conceptions, or "notions," and principles of belief. As the coach example illustrates, these principles of belief are things like the belief "that a coach is passing."

Reid discusses *first* principles of belief, which are a subset of principles of belief, far more than he discusses principles of belief in general. In considering the nature of principles as things believed, it will therefore be helpful to consider passages about first principles of belief insofar as they are discussing principles of belief. I will later examine first principles of belief *qua first* principles of belief.

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[51] Ibid., 176 (AUL MS 2131/4/I/16).

[52] Reid, *AP*, V.i, 270, emphasis added.

[53] Reid, *Inquiry*, II.vii, 38.

Reid understands beliefs, or judgments—he does not generally distinguish between the two[54]—as mental acts of affirmation or denial:

> The definition commonly given of judgment, by the more ancient writers in logic, was, that it is an act of the mind, whereby one thing is affirmed or denied of another. I believe this is as good a definition of it as can be given. . . . [M]ental affirmation or denial . . . is only another name for judgment.[55]

Judgments vary in terms of strength: "But when there is not only a conception of the proposition, but a mental affirmation or negation, an assent or dissent of the understanding, whether weak or strong, that is judgment."[56] Or as Reid writes elsewhere, "Belief admits of all degrees from the slightest suspicion to the fullest assurance."[57]

Reid's principles of belief are not mental acts of affirmation or denial, but rather that which is mentally assented to; they are not believings, but things believed: "In all rational belief, *the thing believed* is either itself a first principle, or it is by just reasoning deduced from first principles."[58] If first principles were acts of belief rather than what is believed, they could not play the foundational status in Reid's epistemology that they are supposed to play. Most of the deductions from first principles are deductions from what

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[54] Others have noted the general interchangeability of these terms for Reid. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense," in *Practices of Belief*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 376 note 4; and William Alston, "Reid on Perception and Conception," in *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*, ed. Melvin Dalgarno and Eric Matthews (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 42. Alston notes the possibility that "judgment is episodic while belief is dispositional." For a discussion of the possible differences between judgment and belief in Reid, see Adam Pelser, "Belief in Reid's Theory of Perception," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (2010): 360. See also Patrick Rysiew, "Reid's [Mis]Characterization of Judgment," *Reid Studies* 3, no. 1 (1999): 63–68. While a few passages suggest a difference between belief and judgment (see, for example, Reid, *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, AUL MS 2131/6/III/14, 159), other passages indicate that Reid sees them as identical (*IP*, VII.iv, 572).

[55] Reid, *IP*, VI.i, 406.

[56] Ibid., VI.iii, 435.

[57] Ibid., II.xx, 228. This passage is not quite accurate: "the slightest suspicion" need not yet amount to a mental affirmation or denial, however weak, and therefore need not be a belief. What the passage does correctly indicate is that belief—mental affirmation or denial—comes in various degrees.

[58] Reid, *AP*, V.i, 270, emphasis added. Reid also speaks of "things believed" in *IP*, VI.iii, 435.

is believed, not from the act of belief. The fact that first principles are what is believed also allows different individuals to have the same first principle. Multiple people can believe the same thing even though their acts of belief are different.

If for Reid a principle of belief is a "thing believed," then what is the nature of these things believed? One initially plausible response is that they are *propositions*: one can believe propositions, propositions seem to be the right sort of things from which to make deductions, and different individuals can believe the same proposition and thus share a principle. At least one passage from Reid suggests such an understanding of principles: "propositions, not ideas, are the object of belief."[59] If propositions are the objects of belief, and principles are "things believed," then it might seem that for Reid, principles are propositions.

While some principles of belief may be propositions, it would be hasty to conclude that all things believed, and thus all principles, are propositions. While the above quotation suggests that all objects of belief are propositions, the context of the passage shows that Reid's key point is that the objects of belief are not ideas in the mind, contra Hume. It is false that "belief is only some modification of the idea which is the object of belief," for in many cases the objects of belief are propositions, not ideas.[60] Other passages make clear that Reid does not think propositions are the only objects of belief. As we will see, the object of our belief can also, for example, be an external object, as in perception.

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[59] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 471.

[60] Ibid.

An analysis of Reidian belief helps clarify the nature of principles of belief as *things believed*. Reid thinks that belief, or judgment, is a "perfectly simple" mental operation, and hence cannot be scientifically defined.[61] Reid nonetheless has quite a bit to say about it. According to Reid,

> Belief must have an object. For he that believes, must believe something; and that which he believes is called the object of his belief. Of this object of his belief, he must have some conception, clear or obscure; for although there may be the most clear and distinct conception of an object without any belief of its existence, there can be no belief without conception.[62]

By a "conception" (or as Reid frequently puts, a "notion," or sometimes even "idea"[63]), Reid means a simple act of apprehension.[64] Conception or apprehension is a mental act by which we get some object in mind in such a ways as to be able to perform some mental operation involving it. Conception is therefore an ingredient of all other operations of the mind, including belief, but conception does not imply belief:

> [C]onception 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: No man can either remember or reason about things of which he hath no conception: When we will to exert any of our active powers, there must be some conception of what we will to do: There can be no desire nor aversion, love nor hatred, without some conception of the object: We cannot feel pain without conceiving it, though we can conceive it without feeling.[65]

Conception is a "mental grip" on an object, to use an apt metaphor from Nicholas Wolterstorff; it is how we "get entities in mind."[66] Since a conception, or simple

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[61] Ibid., II.xx, 227.

[62] Ibid., II.xx, 227–228.

[63] Reid uses all three of these terms interchangeably in *IP*, VI.v, 479.

[64] For passages identifying conception with simple apprehension, see *IP*, I.i, 24 and IV.i, 295.

[65] Reid, *IP*, IV.i, 295–296.

[66] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4, 6.

apprehension, does not involve affirmation or denial, it is not, properly speaking, either true or false.[67]

There are two aspects to these mental grippings: *what* is gripped, and *how* it is gripped. Todd Buras has helpfully called these the *referential content* of a conception and the *descriptive content* of a conception.[68] The referential content is the object that is conceived; it is what the act of conception refers to. Thus, when I conceive of the picture above my desk, the referential content of my act of conception is the picture above my desk. The descriptive content is how I describe, present, or portray the object that I conceive. Different acts of conception can have the same referential content, or object, but different descriptive contents. For example, I can conceive of the picture above my desk as "the picture above my desk," or as "my print of Raphael's *School of Athens*." Both of these refer to the same object, but they present it under different descriptions.[69] The distinction between the referential and descriptive content of the object of belief is nicely illustrated in a previously quoted passage. It should be noted that Reid shifts between two senses of "object of belief": an object of belief as a thing believed, including both the referential and descriptive content of a belief, and an object of belief as just the referential content of belief, or that which a belief is about. Reid writes,

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[67] When conceptions "have an original or archetype to which they refer, and with which they are believed to agree," then Reid allows that we can, in a loose sense, call such conceptions "true" or "false" insofar as they are accurate or inaccurate (*IP*, IV.i, 302). It should be kept in mind that, as Reid notes, "conceive" is sometimes used to mean judgment: "[W]hen we would express our opinion modestly, instead of saying, 'This is my opinion,' or, 'this is my judgment,' which has the air of dogmaticalness, we say, 'I conceive it to be thus, I imagine or apprehend it to be thus;' which is understood as a modest declaration of our judgment" (*IP*, I.i, 25).

[68] Buras, "Function of Sensations," 330.

[69] Reid notes that we can have both direct conceptions of things—conceptions of them as they are in themselves—and relative conceptions of things—conceptions of them in relation to one or more other things. See *IP*, II.xvii, 201.

> Belief must have an object. For he that believes, must believe something; and that which he believes is called the object of his belief [i.e., the thing believed]. Of this object of his belief [referential content], he must have some conception, clear or obscure [descriptive content]; for although there may be the most clear and distinct conception of an object without any belief [mental affirmation] of its existence, there can be no belief without conception.[70]

Belief involves getting an object in mind in a certain way—conceiving it—and mentally affirming or denying that presentation of the object. Thus, for Reid, there are three key aspects of a belief: Belief "is an *act of the mind*, whereby *one thing* is affirmed or denied of *another*."[71] A belief involves (1) mentally affirming or denying (2) something (descriptive content) of (3) some object of belief (referential content).[72] For example, in a perceptual belief, the object of belief (referential content) is an external object, such as a tree. When I perceive the tree, I present it to myself under the description of a tree (descriptive content), and believe of the tree that it presently exists.[73] I give, as Buras puts it, "a mental nod of approval or disapproval" to this way of presenting the object.[74]

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[70] Ibid., II.xx, 227–228.

[71] Ibid., VI.i, 406.

[72] I am using "object" in a general sense, including material objects but also things such as propositions.

[73] Some passages in Reid suggest an interpretation of perceptual beliefs different than the following one presented by Buras. Somewhat problematically, Reid sometimes seems to understand existence as a property that is predicated in perceptual beliefs. According to this interpretation, in perceiving a tree, I mentally apprehend the tree in front of me (referential content) as a tree in front of me (descriptive content), and mentally affirm its existence. In this mental affirmation, I must also have a conception of existence, which is what I affirm of the object of belief. Reid writes, "How early the notion of existence enters into the mind, I cannot determine; but it must certainly be in the mind, as soon as we can affirm of any thing, with understanding, that it exists" (*IP*, VI.i, 415; see II.v, 100 for a similar passage).

[74] Todd Buras, "Three Grades of Immediate Perception: Thomas Reid's Distinctions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, no. 3 (2008): 613. More technically, Buras writes that conceptions "are thoughts whose logical form is $\Phi(x)$, where the value of Φ specifies the descriptive content of the act, and the value of x specifies the referential content. . . . Beliefs are thoughts of the logical form, $\exists x\Phi(x)$" (ibid.).

Principles of belief are "things believed." The thing believed, or what we believe, is neither the act of belief nor the object of belief, but rather the propositional content of the act of belief. Principles of belief must, of course, be believed by *someone*; otherwise, they would not be principles *of belief*. Because they must be believed, they are principles of belief relative to one or more individuals.[75]

2. First Principles

The term "first principle" suffers from the same ambiguity found in its constituent term "principle." Reid uses it to refer to original, as opposed to acquired, constitutional principles; things believed non-inferentially, including self-evident general truths; and fundamental scientific principles, including general descriptions of original constitutional principles. I am particularly concerned with first principles in the sense of things believed non-inferentially. I will focus on this sense and distinguish several important categories of such first principles.

2.1. First Principles as Original Constitutional Principles

Reid sometimes uses "first principle" to refer to original, as opposed to acquired, laws of our constitution, or to refer to general descriptions or propositional representations of these laws.[76] That is, in the phrase "first principles" he sometimes uses *principles* in the senses explained above in sections 1.1 and 1.2: first principles are

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[75] Or perhaps to some kind of entity; something might be a principle of belief for mature, properly functioning humans.

[76] According to Keith DeRose, "It is important to note that, in Reid's terminology, an 'original principle of our constitution' is not the same thing as a 'first principle' or a 'principle of common sense'" (Keith DeRose, "Reid's Anti-Sensationalism and His Realism," *The Philosophical Review* 98, no. 3 (1989): 326). In general, it is correct that Reid does not use "first principle" interchangeably with "original principle." But this is not universally true, contra DeRose.

original constitutional principles (laws), or the representations of these laws in propositions. By *first* principles, he means those constitutional principles that are original, or sometimes descriptions of original constitutional principles. For example, Reid writes,

> Are there any principles with regard to the mind, settled with that perspicuity and evidence, which attends the principles of mechanics, astronomy, and optics? . . . But when we turn our attention inward, and consider the phenomena of human thought, opinions, and perceptions, and endeavour to trace them to the general laws and the *first principles of our constitution*, we are immediately involved in darkness and perplexity.[77]

Thus, it is by a first principle of our constitution that certain tactile sensations suggest the conception of and belief in a presently existing hard object. Reid does not normally use "first principle" in these senses.

For clarity's sake, I will not use "first principle" to refer to original constitutional principles or to general descriptions of these laws. I will always use "first principle" in the sense explained below in 2.2, which is how it is typically used by Reid.[78]

2.2. First Principles as Things Believed Non-Inferentially

Most of the time Reid uses "first principles" to refer to things believed in a certain way: "In all rational belief, the thing believed is either itself a first principle, or it is by just reasoning deduced from first principles."[79] First principles are "things believed"; they are principles in the sense explained in section 1.3. As this quotation suggests, the key

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[77] Reid, *Inquiry*, I.iii, 16. See also *Inquiry*, II.i, 25; V.ii, 57; and V.iii, 60).

[78] Keith Lehrer often uses "first principles" to refer to original principles, or innate principles of our constitution. See, for example, Keith Lehrer, "Reid on Evidence and Conception," in *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*, ed. Melvin Dalgarno and Eric Matthews (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 121–144. This usage is not standard in the literature, nor is it in keeping with Reid's typical usage of "first principle."

[79] Reid, *AP*, V.i, 270.

distinguishing feature of first principles is the fact that they are not deduced, or inferred. First principles enjoy epistemic priority; they are first in the order of knowledge.

The following important passage from the *Intellectual Powers* clarifies several important features of first principles. In additional to being believed immediately, or non-inferentially, first principles are believed irresistibly and through the determinations of our constitution:

> There are other truths in mathematics of which we have not only an irresistible, but an immediate conviction. Such are the axioms. Our belief of the axioms in mathematics is not grounded upon argument. Arguments are grounded upon them, but their evidence is discerned immediately by the human understanding.
>
> It is, no doubt, one thing to have an immediate conviction of a self-evident axiom; it is another thing to have an immediate conviction of the existence of what we see; but the conviction is equally *immediate* and equally *irresistible* in both cases. No man thinks of seeking a reason to believe what he sees; and before we are capable of reasoning, we put no less confidence in our senses than after. The rudest savage is as fully convinced of what he sees, and hears, and feels, as the most expert Logician.[80] The *constitution* of our understanding determines us to hold the truth of a mathematical axiom as a *first principle*, from which other truths may be deduced, but it is deduced from none; and the *constitution* of our power of perception determines us to hold the existence of what we distinctly perceive as a *first principle*, from which other truths may be deduced, but it is deduced from none.[81]

First principles are things our constitution determines us to believe immediately and irresistibly. Our belief of a first principle is immediate because it is not inferred through arguments and reasoning, but is the effect of our constitution. For example, in tactile perception a certain sensation suggests a belief in a presently existing hard object. While this belief is suggested by the sensation that is the natural sign for it, the belief is not

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[80] This does not imply that the justification of the savage's and logician's beliefs cannot be boosted. While the savage and the logician may be equally and fully convinced of what they see, this is a psychological fact. For someone who is maximally convinced of p, acquiring additional justification for p may not make a psychological difference in the strength with which he holds p. But this does mean that he cannot acquire additional justification for p. I discuss this issue more fully in chapter 5, footnote 61.

[81] Reid, *IP*, II.v, 99–100, all emphases added.

inferred from the sensation.[82] It is rather suggested, or triggered, according to our constitutional principles in response to the sensation. The distinction between first principles and inferred principles as regards things believed is the same as the distinction between intuitive and discursive as regards mental acts of judgment:

> Yet there is a distinction between reasoning and judging. Reasoning is the process by which we pass from one judgment to another which is the consequence of it. Accordingly our judgments are distinguished into intuitive, which are not grounded upon any preceding judgment, and discursive, which are deduced from some preceding judgment by reasoning.[83]

As Reid writes elsewhere, "The belief of first principles is not an act of the reasoning power: For all reasoning must be grounded upon them. We judge them to be true, and believe them without reasoning. . . . [O]ur belief of first principles is an act of pure judgment without reasoning."[84] First principles are things we believe intuitively, and inferred principles are things we believe discursively.[85] We believe first principles not because of reasoning, but because our constitution determines us to believe them.

Our belief of first principles is "irresistible" because a principle of our constitution "determines us to hold" them; the belief is involuntary and not directly under our control. While Reid sometimes claims that all first principles are believed irresistibly, this does not seem to be his most nuanced opinion. Reid does think that we believe some

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[82] Indeed, Reid argues that such an inference would be impossible, given the utter dissimilarity of the sensation and the conception and belief that it suggests. It might also be impossible because the sensation is not the sort of thing to stand in inference relations.

[83] Reid, *IP*, VII.i, 542.

[84] Ibid., VII.iv, 572.

[85] In an unpublished manuscript, Reid writes, "All our Judgments are either {immediate &} Intuitive or {they are} discursive & mediate" (Reid, *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 164; braces indicate supralinear material).

first principles irresistibly.[86] But irresistibility is not a necessary feature of all first principles. Reid seems to think that we might on occasion *temporarily* resist certain first principles. For example, according to Reid it is a first principle "That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious."[87] In his discussion of this first principle, he writes that

> a real belief of [the natural faculties] being fallacious cannot be maintained for any considerable time by the greatest Sceptic, because it is doing violence to our constitution. It is like a man's walking upon his hands, a feat which some men upon occasion can exhibit; but no man ever made a long journey in this manner. Cease to admire his dexterity, and he will, like other men, betake himself to his legs.[88]

This passage and others suggest that someone can doubt or even deny some first principles, but only for a brief period of time.[89] Since our constitution determines us to believe a first principle, doubting or denying it involves "doing violence to our constitution." We soon tire of this constant exertion of our will in resistance to our nature, and our constitution once again determines us to believe the first principle. Reid also seems to think that in some situations we may cease to believe certain first principles altogether. As he at one point writes, "Nor is it impossible, that what is really a first

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[86] This would seem to be especially the case of those first principles that we believe through the operations of original principles of our constitution. Reid elsewhere speaks of perceptual beliefs as being irresistible, particularly when they are clear and distinct (e.g., *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 169; *IP*, II.v, 97-99), but see my discussion below.

[87] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 480.

[88] Ibid., VI.v, 481.

[89] For example, in the *Inquiry* Reid writes, "When a man suffers himself to be reasoned out of the principles of common sense [a subset of first principles], by metaphysical arguments, we may call this *metaphysical lunacy*; which differs from the other species of the distemper in this, that it is not continued, but intermittent: it is apt to seize the patient in solitary and speculative moments; but when he enters into society, Common Sense recovers her authority" (*Inquiry*, VII.4, 215-216).

principle may, by the enchantment of words, have such a mist thrown about it, as to hide its evidence, and to make a man of candour doubt of it."[90]

While irresistibility is a typical feature of first principles, it is derivative from the fact that our belief of first principles is the immediate effect of our constitution. Moreover, irresistibility is not a unique and defining feature of first principles:

> The conviction of a truth may be irresistible, and yet not immediate. Thus my conviction that the three angles of every plain triangle are equal to two right angles, is irresistible, but it is not immediate: I am convinced of it by demonstrative reasoning.[91]

Our judgment of a truth may be irresistible but not intuitive. This may be either because we see that it is the consequence of demonstrative reasoning, as in the above passage, or because we have such strong cumulative evidence for it that our belief is irresistible.[92]

Something is a first principle by virtue of *how* it is believed. A first principle is something believed immediately, or non-inferentially, as a result of the doxastic principles of our constitution. This definition says nothing about *what* is believed. The distinctive feature of first principles is how they come to be believed. Because some things believed non-inferentially by one person are not believed non-inferentially by other people, it follows that at least some first principles are agent-relative. *P* can be a first principle for person A but not for person B. This could be because B disbelieves *P*, or because B has no belief regarding *P*, or because B comes to believe *P* through some

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[90] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 41. Another, different manner in which we might cease to believe a first principle is through becoming aware of a defeater for it. For example, if we have reason to think that our sight in deceiving us in a particular situation, then we might doubt various perceptual first principles. While I might have held it as a first principle that the sheet of paper in front of me is red, I may doubt this upon learning that the room is illuminated with a red light. While Reid does not use the language of defeaters, I argue in chapter 4 that his epistemology contains a very developed understanding of defeaters.

[91] Ibid., II.v, 99.

[92] Ibid., VII.iii, 556.

inference (*P* is not a *first* principle for B). There are various ways this could happen. A might immediately perceive that there is a small bell behind her through the sense of hearing, but B, who is sitting beside her, might not because B is deaf, whether because he lacks the requisite faculty or because it has been damaged. If B's faculty of hearing is fine, B might still not perceive that there is a small bell behind him because such a perception is an acquired perception, requiring experience and training of the appropriate faculty. B might still believe that there is a small bell behind him through a quick piece of reasoning, but this will not be a *first* principle for him.

First principles are relative not only to different individuals, but to the same individual at different times. At t_1 person A might reason from the sound outside to the conclusion that a coach is passing. After repeatedly performing this inference, at t_2 A might acquire the auditory perception of coaches passing, at which point the sound of a coach passing triggers in her the belief that a coach is passing. This belief is a first principle. After not hearing coaches pass for a number of years, A might lose the acquired auditory perception of coaches passing. When a coach then passes by at t_3, A might infer from the sound that a coach is passing outside. This belief is not a first principle.[93]

As we will see, Reid thinks there are certain things that everyone believes as first principles. Even these common first principles, however, are in a certain sense relative. As will be explained, they are relative to properly functioning adult humans who have

[93] A similar story might be told regarding original perceptions. At an early stage of development, our faculties are not yet developed enough to create in us the belief of various first principles. As we develop, our faculties then produce in us various beliefs, which are first principles and original perceptions. If, however, our faculties are damaged, then we may no longer have some of those original perceptions.

had a properly varied set of human experiences. What is a common first principle for such beings will not, for example, be a first principle for an infant or a dog.

Because Reid's first principles are defined according to how they are believed, it is easiest to categorize them according to how they are non-inferentially believed. After categorizing them in this manner, I will then briefly consider some key distinctions among first principles based on their content, or what is believed.

2.2.1. Categorization of Reid's first principles according to how they come to be believed. A first principle may be categorized according to a) whether the belief of the first principle is the result of an original or an acquired doxastic principle, b) which faculty is responsible for it, and c) whether it is suggested by a sign (either natural or artificial) or is "self-evident" (a special case that will require further examination).

First principles that are believed as a result of the original doxastic principles of our constitution are, in a temporal and developmental sense, prior to all other first principles. They provide our original doxastic experiences, and it is these original doxastic experiences, combined with various general principles of our constitution, that result in acquired doxastic principles. For example, the tactile perception of hard objects is associated with certain visual appearances through the inductive principle of our constitution, and as a result we acquire the ability to see that certain objects are hard. We acquire the visual perception of hardness. This whole process is temporally and developmentally prior to the visual perception of hardness. But once we have acquired this perceptual ability, we can visually perceive hardness immediately. So some first principles are the result of original doxastic principles. All original perceptions are

examples of such principles. Other first principles are the result of acquired doxastic principles. All acquired perceptions are examples of such principles.

First principles may also be categorized according to the faculty responsible for them. As already discussed, there are what we might call *perceptual* first principles: "the constitution of our power of perception determines us to hold the existence of what we distinctly perceive as a first principle, from which other truths may be deduced, but it is deduced from none."[94] We might further categorize perceptual first principles based on the particular external sense that suggests them, such as visual, tactile, and auditory first principles. There are also what we might call *memorial* first principles:

> I remember distinctly to have dined yesterday with such a company. What is the meaning of this? it is, that I have a distinct conception and firm belief of this past event; not by reasoning, not by testimony, but immediately from my constitution: And I give the name of memory to that part of my constitution, by which I have this kind of conviction of past events.[95]

We might similarly distinguish first principles of *consciousness*, first principles of *conscience*, *aesthetic* first principles, *testimonial* first principles, first principles of *reason* (self-evident truths), and so forth.

Finally, first principles can be distinguished according to what we might call the *belief stimulus*—that is, what occasions the principles of our constitution to determine us to non-inferentially believe a first principle. The belief stimuli of many first principles are *signs*. A sign is any stimulant or input that, according to the conceptual and doxastic principles of our constitution (whether original or acquired), suggests, or produces, a conception and belief. For example, a certain tactile sensation suggests the conception of

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[94] Reid, *IP*, II.v, 100.

[95] Ibid., II.xx, 232.

a presently existing object and the belief in its existence. A certain appearance on someone's face suggests the conception of her as happy and the belief that this is so. First principles suggested by signs may be further distinguished according to whether they are suggested by natural signs, where the connection between sign and thing signified is established by nature, or by artificial signs, where the connection between sign and thing signified is established by human convention. The belief stimuli of other first principles, however, are not signs. Signs suggest both a conception and a belief. But some belief stimuli suggest only belief. As we have already seen, according to Reid belief must involve conception, or simple apprehension. It therefore seems odd to state that a belief stimulus might suggest only belief and not conception. After all, we must believe *something*. This oddity is resolved by the fact that such belief stimuli are *simple apprehensions* that, according to the doxastic principles of our constitution, suggest belief *in themselves* when they are clearly understood. These stimuli supply in themselves all the conceptual material needed for belief, and require only mental assent. An example from the *Inquiry* is the mathematical axiom "that two quantities which are equal to the same quantity, are equal to each other":

> Simple perception has the same relation to the conclusions of reason drawn from our perceptions, as the axioms in mathematics have to the propositions. I cannot demonstrate, that two quantities which are equal to the same quantity, are equal to each other; neither can I demonstrate, that the tree which I perceive, exists. But, by the constitution of my nature, my belief is irresistibly carried along by my apprehension of the axiom; and, by the constitution of my nature, my belief is no less irresistibly carried along by my perception of the tree. All reasoning is from principles. The first principles of mathematical reasoning are mathematical axioms and definitions; and the first principles of all our reasoning about existences, are our perceptions.[96]

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[96] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 172.

Mathematical axioms—the first principles of mathematical reasoning—are, "by the constitution of my nature," believed "irresistibly." While various things might be the occasion of us apprehending or contemplating such an axiom, our *belief* of it (assuming we believe it as a first principle) is not suggested by whatever occasions our apprehension of it. Rather, "by the constitution of my nature, my belief is irresistibly carried along *by my apprehension of the axiom*." The axiom which I apprehend itself suggests my belief in it, in accordance with my doxastic constitutional principles. As Reid writes in one of his manuscripts, "My perception of every self-evident truth depends upon my constitution, and is the immediate effect [1] of my constitution, and [2] of that truth being presented to my mind."[97] In the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid similarly writes,

> There are, therefore, common principles, which are the foundation of all reasoning, and of all science. Such common principles seldom admit of direct proof, nor do they need it. Men need not to be taught them; for they are such as all men of common understanding know; or such, at least, as they give a ready assent to, as soon as they are proposed and understood.[98]

These common first principles are not suggested by signs. When clearly understood, the simple apprehension of them suggests an irresistible belief in them; they are such that "all men of common understanding . . . give a ready assent to, *as soon as they are proposed and understood*."

Reid frequently calls such first principles "self-evident truths":

> We are apt to conceive it as a self-evident truth, that what is to come must be similar to what is past. Thus, if a certain degree of cold freezes water to-day, and has been known to do so in all time past, we have no doubt but the same degree of

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[97] Thomas Reid, "MSS. Papers by Dr. Reid, Lent Me by Francis Edmund, Esq., Aberdeen," in *The Scottish Philosophy*, by James McCosh (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1875), 475.

[98] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 39.

> cold will freeze water to-morrow, or a year hence. That this is a truth which all men believe as soon as they understand it, I readily admit. . . .[99]

Significantly, Reid differs from many of his predecessors in calling a large number of contingent truths, such as the above, self-evident. Reid does not limit self-evident truths to analytic and necessary truths.[100] By "self-evident," Reid seems to mean that a truth is such that, according to the doxastic principles of our constitution, it contains within itself its own evidence or "just grounds of belief."[101] The belief of a self-evident truth "arise[s] from intuitive evidence in the thing believed."[102]

While Reid often uses "self-evident" in the above sense, he sometimes uses it in a loose and imprecise sense to refer to beliefs that are held immediately—that is, to first principles in general. In response to the question "Shall we say then that the evidence of sense is the same with that of axioms, or self-evident truths?" Reid writes,

> *Thirdly*, 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 objects of sense may be called an axiom [i.e., self-evident truth]. For my senses give me as immediate conviction of what they testify, as my understanding gives of what is commonly called an axiom.[103]

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[99] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 196. In the final sentence, I take the "this" to mean the following: "if a certain degree of cold freezes water to-day, and has been known to do so in all time past, . . . the same degree of cold will freeze water to-morrow, or a year hence." The omitted "we have no doubt but" is not part of what is self-evident (what is self-evident is not a psychological claim), but just Reid's way of expressing this self-evident truth.

[100] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 468.

[101] At one point Reid writes, "We give the name of evidence to whatever is a ground of belief" (*IP*, II.xx, 228). I think Reid here means "whatever is a *just* ground of belief," given his use of this qualifier in the immediate context of this passage, including twice in the immediately preceding sentence. At any rate, given that Reid thinks self-evident principles provide a good ground of belief, he thinks that they contain within themselves "just grounds of belief." In consider the nature of Reidian evidence in chapter 7.

[102] Reid, *IP*, II.xxi, 238.

[103] Ibid., II.xx, 231.

Confusingly, Reid sometimes adopts this usage of self-evident. When I use the term self-evident, however, I will use it to refer to only those truths, both necessary and contingent, that, according to the principles of our constitution, trigger belief in themselves as soon as they are understood.

2.2.2. Some key distinctions among Reid's first principles based on their content. First principles are defined by the non-inferential manner in which they are believed and not by their content. However, it is useful to note briefly the great variety among first principles as regards the sort of thing that can be believed. My discussion is limited to first principles for properly functioning adult humans. Infants and dogs could not have this variety of first principles; and since according to Reid God knows everything intuitively, God's beliefs are all first principles.[104]

As already mentioned, many first principles are about the existence of particular objects. This is the case with all perceptual first principles. First principles can also be about mental entities. For example, it could be a first principle that I am now experiencing pain. All these are examples of contingent truths about particulars. According to Reid, contingent truths about general or abstract matters can also be first principles. As already mentioned, for example, it is a self-evident truth "that what is to come must be similar to what is past." There are also necessary first principles that are self-evidently necessary. Examples include elementary mathematical principles and many other abstract truths. According to Reid, these necessary self-evident truths differ from contingent self-evident truths in that when they are understood they trigger not only belief in their truth, but also belief in the necessity of their truth: "There are many

[104] Ibid., VII.i, 543.

propositions which, by the faculties God has given us, we judge to be necessary, as well as true."[105] According to Reid God's existence is the only necessary truth regarding existence, but Reid does not seem to think that belief in God's existence is a first principle for humans.

2.3. Scientific First Principles

As regards the principles of a science, Reid seems to think that these can be "first principles" in two senses. As already mentioned, Reid accepts two general types of scientific principles: self-evident scientific principles and inductive scientific principles. Self-evident scientific principles are first principles of a science in (at least) an epistemic sense: they are general truths of a science known non-inferentially.[106] But Reid also seems to refer to the principles of a science as being first not in the order of what we know, but in the ordering of a body of scientific knowledge. The first principles of a science can be general, fundamental truths from which we reason synthetically in the practical part of a science. As Reid writes in a letter to Lord Kames,

> Our senses testify particular facts onely, from these we collect by Induction general Facts which we call Laws of Nature, or natural Causes. . . . This is the analytical Part of natural Philosophy. The synthetical Part, takes for granted, as Principles, the Causes discovered by Induction, and from these explains, or accounts for the Phenomena which result from them. This Analysis & Synthesis make up the whole Theory of Natural Philosophy. The Practical part consists in applying the Laws of Nature to produce Effects usefull in Life.[107]

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[105] Ibid., IV.iii, 332. For a similar passage, see *IP*, II.xx, 231.

[106] Thus, for instance, Reid writes, "And this indeed is common to every branch of human knowledge that deserves the name of science. There must be first principles proper to that science, by which the whole superstructure is supported. The first principles of all the sciences, must be the immediate dictates of our natural faculties; nor is it possible that we should have any other evidence of their truth" (*AP*, III.pt 3.vi, 178).

[107] Reid, *Correspondence*, 141 (NAS MS GD24/1/569/34–7; 16 December 1780). In the following paragraph, Reid writes that he learned "this view of natural Philosophy . . . from Newton."

The Laws of Nature which are known inductively form the basis from which a science proceeds synthetically. Reid writes that "[t]he synthetical Part, takes for granted, as Principles, the Causes discovered by Induction." Reid often uses this language of "taken for granted" to describe first principles. In the above passage he seems to describe the Laws of Nature as first principles—that is, the most general principles from which a science reasons. While Reid claims to be drawing from Newton in the above passage, he seems also to be drawing from Aristotle. In his commentary on Aristotle's logic, he writes,

> Another thing treated of in this book is, the manner in which we acquire first principles, which are the foundation of all demonstration. These are not innate, because we may be for a great part of life ignorant of them: nor can they be deduced demonstratively from any antecedent knowledge, otherwise they would not be first principles. Therefore he concludes, that first principles are got by induction, from the informations of sense. The senses give us informations of individual things, and from these by induction we draw general conclusions: for it is a maxim with Aristotle, That there is nothing in the understanding which was not before in some sense. The knowledge of first principles, as it is not acquired by demonstration, ought not to be called science; and therefore he calls it *intelligence*.[108]

While inductive first principles are not first in the order of knowledge, they are first in the sense of being fundamental truths of a science from which the reasoning and demonstration in that science proceeds. Reid's *self-evident* scientific principles are first principles in both the sense of being fundamental truths of a science and in the sense of being things that we know non-inferentially.[109]

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[108] Reid, *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 135; from "A Brief Account of Aristotle's Logic," V.i.

[109] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 39. In one passage that I am aware of, Reid calls particular perceptions the first principles of a science, suggesting that the phenomena from which a general inductive truth is arrived at are also scientific first principles. These principles would be first epistemically and in the analytic part of natural philosophy. See *AP*, III.pt 3.iii, 178-179.

CHAPTER THREE

Common Sense and the Principles of Common Sense

Given the centrality of common sense and the principles of common sense to Reid's epistemology, any account of Reid's epistemology must wrestle with what he means by these confusing terms. This is especially true of our investigation into the role that theism plays in the epistemic justification of first principles, and in particular the justification of those first principles of common sense concerned with the veridical nature of our faculties. Clarifying the principles of common sense also prepares the way for distinguishing different levels of knowledge in chapter 7. Chapter 2 distinguished and clarified several of the key senses in which Reid uses the terms "principle" and "first principle." This chapter builds on those distinctions to provide a novel and illuminating account of common sense and the principles of common sense. This account advances the literature on the topic and answers a number of objections to Reid's principles of common sense.

Reid's discussion of common sense and the principles of common sense is certainly confusing, and as we will see, at certain points it is confused. However, by distinguishing different senses in which Reid speaks of common sense and its principles, and by paying careful attention to what he says about each of these, I hope to show that, while confusing, Reid it not as confused as some commentators have portrayed him. Section 1 argues that Reid understands common sense as a faculty (or set of faculties). I contend that in Reid's epistemology the faculty of common sense plays not one but two

roles. First, common sense functions as a faculty of judgment. More controversially, common sense functions as a faculty for judging of self-evident truths, and Reid does not confuse self-evident with immediately evident. Second, common sense functions as a conceptual faculty, and is responsible for the acquisition of many of our distinct concepts. This important conceptual function of common sense has been entirely overlooked in the literature.

In section 2 I propose a new interpretation of the principles of common sense and show several of its advantages. I argue Reid has a dual understanding of the principles of common sense. In the first place, they are principles self-evident to (but not necessarily believed by) what I call epistemically competent adults. This original interpretation has strong textual support, and it answers a number of objections to Reid's principles of common sense, making it a significant contribution to the literature. I argue that Reid secondly understands the principles of common sense as things that all epistemically competent adults take for granted, or presuppose, in their everyday lives. I contrast my interpretation of the dual nature of the principles of common sense with Nicholas Wolterstorff's, and argue contra Wolterstorff that while Reid has two distinct lines of thought, they are not incompatible: the principles of common sense are things that are both self-evident to and taken for granted by epistemically competent adults.

1. The Faculty of Common Sense

Reid maintains a fairly clear distinction in his writings between *common sense*—or as he sometimes calls it, *common understanding*[1]—and *the principles of common sense*. By common sense, Reid usually means a faculty or set of faculties—that is, one of

[1] For an example, see *IP*, I.ii, 39.

those "powers of the mind which are original and natural, and which make a part of the constitution of the mind."[2] As many commentators on Reid have noted, the faculty of common sense is a faculty of judgment. But it is also a faculty of concept acquisition, a point that, to the best of my knowledge, no one in the Reid literature has noted. As we will see, these two functions of common sense are not wholly separate: we acquire concepts by common sense only in certain judgments of common sense. For clarity of presentation I treat these functions separately.

1.1. Common Sense as a Faculty of Judgment

In a key passage, Reid describes common sense as a "branch" of reason and a faculty of judging:

> It is absurd to conceive that there can be any opposition between reason and common sense. It is indeed the first-born of reason, and as they are commonly joined together in speech and in writing, they are inseparable in their nature.
>
> We ascribe to reason two offices, or two degrees. The first is to judge of things self-evident; the second to draw conclusions that are not self-evident from those that are. The first of these is the province, and the sole province of common sense; and therefore it coincides with reason in its [i.e., common sense's] whole extent, and is only another name for one branch or one degree of reason.[3]

Reason has two "offices" or "degrees" or "branches," one of which is "the power of reasoning"—that is, the power "of drawing a conclusion from a chain of premises."[4] When Reid contrasts common sense with reason, he is contrasting it with reason in this discursive sense, and not with reason as a whole.[5] There is also a "degree" of reason that non-inferentially "judge[s] of things self-evident." Here Reid uses "degree" to make a

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[2] Reid, *IP*, I.i, 21.

[3] Ibid., VI.ii, 432–433.

[4] Ibid., VI.iv, 453.

[5] For example, in the *Inquiry* Reid writes, "They are first principles; and such fall not within the province of Reason, but of Common Sense" (*Inquiry*, II.v, 32).

qualitative distinction: there is an office or branch of reason that enables us to judge of or believe self-evident truths non-inferentially. Some commentators have mistakenly interpreted this instance of "degree" in quantitative terms, and hence misunderstood the relation of common sense to reasoning.[6] Reid does not give a name to the part of reason that "judge[s] of things self-evident." Since it roughly coincides with what Aristotle calls *nous*, let us refer to it as *nous*. By self-evident propositions, Reid means propositions, both necessary and contingent, whose truth is immediately evident upon being understood; they are propositions that "are no sooner understood than they are believed."[7] Significantly, Reid claims that judging of self-evident truths is "the province, and the *sole* province of common sense." Some Reid scholars have mistakenly claimed common sense is responsible for perceptual beliefs, which are immediately evident but not self-evident.[8] Others have claimed that by common sense Reid means all belief-forming faculties other than reason.[9]

While *nous* is "the sole province of common sense," Reid does not claim that all judgments of *nous* are judgments of common sense. That is, he does not claim that all

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[6] Apparently as a result of mistakenly thinking that by a "degree of reason" Reid means an *amount* of reason rather than a *branch* of reason, Patrick Rysiew and James Somerville have incorrectly claimed that according to Reid common sense includes reason*ing* (which, as I noted, Reid contrasts with common sense). See Patrick Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 209 (2002): 442; Somerville, "Common Sense," 426.

[7] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 452. This will require some qualification later. For instance, self-evident propositions are believed upon being *clearly* understood. Moreover, self-evidence is always relative to some person or class of persons.

[8] According to Gideon Yaffe and Ryan Nichols, "Perceptions, then, are dictates of common sense: to be aware of an object in perception is to have a belief which you cannot give up given your constitution." See Gideon Yaffe and Ryan Nichols, "Thomas Reid," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2009, accessed May 15, 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2009/entries/reid/.

[9] P. D. Magnus claims that "Reid uses the phrase 'common sense' to mean these faculties other than reason—our senses, our memory, and so on." See P. D. Magnus, "Reid's Defense of Common Sense," *Philosophers' Imprint* 8, no. 3 (2008): 3. For a similar claim, see Somerville, "Common Sense," 426.

immediate judgments of self-evident truths fall within the province of common sense, though he does claim that all judgments of common sense are immediate judgments of self-evident truths. *Nous*, the power of judging of self-evident truths, "is given by Heaven to different persons in different degrees," or amounts, and common sense is that "degree of it which is necessary to our being subjects of law and government, capable of managing our own affairs, and answerable for our conduct towards others: This is called common sense, because it is common to all men with whom we can transact business, or call to account for their conduct."[10] Here Reid does not use "degree" in the sense of an office or branch, but rather in the sense of an amount or extent, as might be measured on a scale. Common sense is that amount of *nous* that is common to normal adults. So common sense is a degree of a degree of reason, meaning that it is an *amount* of a *branch* of reason. This is, for example, similar to how common jumping ability is that amount of the power to jump that is common among humans. Reid does not understand common sense as a specific amount of *nous*, but rather as a range on the spectrum of this power. It is more *nous* than a child possesses, but less than a genius possesses. Reid most clearly explains this in his unpublished "Curâ Primâ on Common Sense," which was presented at the Literary Society of Glasgow between the publications of his *Inquiry* and *Intellectual Powers*. He there writes,

> We conceive various degrees in what we call common sense. It fills up all the interval between idiocy on one hand and uncommon discernment and penetration on the other. And it is hardly possible to ascertain the line where one of these ends and the other begins.[11]

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[10] Reid, *IP*, VI.ii, 426. Reid similarly writes, "Common sense is that degree of judgment which is common to men with whom we can converse and transact business" (ibid., VI.ii, 424).

[11] Thomas Reid, "Appendix: Thomas Reid's Curâ Primâ on Common Sense," ed. David Fate Norton, in *Claude Buffier and Thomas Reid: Two Common-Sense Philosophers*, by Louise Marcil-Lacoste

While Reid clearly thinks common sense is statistically common among adult humans, he thinks it is statistically common because it is common to human nature; it is natural for humans to have common sense.

Reid has quite a bit to say about common sense, and some of these points I will consider in greater depth later. As a faculty, common sense "is purely the gift of Heaven. And where Heaven has not given it, no education can supply the want."[12] Like other faculties, common sense requires a certain maturity for its appearance and development.[13] And like other faculties, it is possessed only by those humans who have a sound, properly functioning mind: "We do not attribute common sense to brutes nor do we expect to find it in infants or idiots; but in persons of mature age who have no natural defect we always expect that degree of discernment and of understanding which we call common sense."[14] According Reid, common sense is "necessary to our being subjects of law and government, capable of managing our own affairs, and answerable for our conduct towards others."[15] As we will see, without common sense it is impossible to learn to reason.[16] This is both because common sense provides the general first principles necessary for reasoning (the principles of common sense), and because common sense is largely responsible for our clear and distinct concepts, "which are the only fit materials

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(Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982), 187. The "Curâ Primâ" is item 2/III/7 in the Birkwood Collection (MS. 2131), King's College, University of Aberdeen. According to Norton, the "Curâ Primâ" was written late in 1768 or very early in 1769.

[12] Reid, *IP*, VI.ii, 433.

[13] Reid writes, "In the gradual progress of man, from infancy to maturity, there is a certain order in which his faculties are unfolded" (*IP*, III.i, 253). Furthermore, "The faculties of conception and judgment have an infancy and a maturity as man has" (*IP*, VI.i, 415).

[14] Reid, "Curâ Primâ," 187.

[15] Reid, *IP*, VI.ii, 426.

[16] Ibid., VI.ii, 433.

for reasoning."[17] Finally, it is common sense alone that entitles most humans "to the denomination of reasonable creatures," for "in the greatest part of mankind no other degree of reason is to be found."[18] Most humans, for example, simply perceive simple mathematical truths, but are unable to prove them or argue for them. By common sense normal humans can immediately know many such truths, both necessary and contingent. The power of reason that enables this entitles them "to the denomination of reasonable creatures," even though they are unable to perform discursive reasoning.

1.2. Common Sense as a Conceptual Faculty

Common sense is a faculty for judging of self-evident truths, and this function of common sense features most prominently in Reid's writings. But like many other original faculties of judgment, such as perceptual faculties, consciousness, conscience, and memory, common sense is also the original source of various concepts or simple apprehensions.[19] It is through the operation of common sense that we acquire many of our concepts, and especially our distinct concepts. So far as I know, no one in the literature on Reid has noted the conceptual functions of common sense.[20] This oversight is probably largely due to the fact that Reid does not discuss these functions in his chapter

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[17] Ibid., VI.i, 414.

[18] Ibid., VI.ii, 433.

[19] At one points Reid writes, "Every faculty furnishes new notions" (*IP*, VIII.iv, 614). This also applies to memory: "As soon therefore as we remember any thing, we must have both a notion and a belief of duration. It is necessarily suggested by every operation of our memory; and to that faculty it ought to be ascribed" (*IP*, III.iii, 259).

[20] In an endnote comparing Kant and Reid, Peter Baumann hints at something similar in passing: "Furthermore, in *Curâ Primâ*, 200ff. Reid describes common sense as the faculty to apply general concepts like identity, number, quality to objects; one could call this Reid's conception of the 'categories'" (Peter Baumann, "The Scottish Pragmatist? The Dilemma of Common Sense and the Pragmatist Way Out," *Reid Studies* 2, no. 2 (1999): 56 note 38). Bauman only notes common sense's role in applying concepts. He says nothing regarding its role in concept acquisition.

on common sense in the *Intellectual Powers*.[21] In his published writings, mentions of these functions of common sense are scattered throughout his discussion of abstraction in Essay V of the *Intellectual Powers*. Reid more clearly elaborates on these functions in his "Curâ Primâ on Common Sense."

As we will see, common sense is responsible for acquiring some abstract concepts, such as the distinct concept of the whiteness of a sheet of paper. It is also responsible for acquiring some distinct concepts that are both abstract and general, such as the distinct concept of whiteness. Of these general concepts, some are simple concepts, such as the concept of whiteness, while others are complex (involving multiple simple concepts), such as the concept of a square. Common sense is not, however, responsible for the acquisition of all abstract concepts or all general concepts, but only those that are acquired in an intuitive, self-evident judgment of common sense. Common sense is not responsible for the acquisition of abstract concepts and general concepts acquired through discursive judgment, or reasoning. Nor is common sense responsible for the acquisition of general concepts/words "learned by a kind of induction, by observing to what individuals they are applied by those who understand the language."[22] Common sense is responsible for acquiring many of our distinct concepts of external objects (e.g., a distinct concept of the coffee mug on my desk) and of the objects of consciousness (e.g., the operations of my mind). By a *distinct* concept, Reid means a concept that its possessor

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[21] See Essay VI, Chapter ii.

[22] Reid, *IP*, V.ii, 363. Reid notes that general concepts acquired in this fashion are "somewhat vague and indistinct" (ibid., V.ii, 362). The concepts acquired by common sense, by contrast, are distinct. In regards to the transition between general words and general concepts, Reid notes, "To conceive the meaning of a general word, and to conceive that which it signifies, is the same thing" (ibid., V.ii, 364). It should be noted that if an individual learns a general concept "by a kind of induction," it might still be the case that within his community the concept was acquired through common-sense judgments of one or more individuals. To these individuals, the general concept would be distinct.

can distinguish from other concepts. If a distinct concept is complex, it is further necessary for its possessor to be able to distinguish its constitutive conceptual elements. For instance, Reid states that a child's concept of a cube "is not distinct because the different ingredients of which it is made up are not distinguished from one another."[23] Distinctness comes in degrees. Reid speaks, for instance, of some concepts being "very distinct,"[24] of "[o]ur most distinct complex notions,"[25] and "somewhat vague and indistinct" complex general concepts.[26]

According to Reid, the concepts we acquire solely through our senses (whether our external or internal senses) are "gross and indistinct, and like the *chaos*, a *rudis indigestaque moles* ['a rough, unordered mass of things']."[27] Common sense is responsible for analyzing this raw material of experience and forming distinct concepts of the objects of experience, distinct abstract concepts, and distinct general concepts (both simple and complex). Significantly, what common sense analyzes is not an external object—or at least, not directly—but rather our *concept* of the object: "If we consider the intellectual analysis of an object, . . . the thing analysed is not an external object imperfectly known; it is a conception of the mind itself. And to suppose that there can be any thing in a conception that is not conceived, is a contradiction."[28]

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[23] Reid, "Curâ Primâ," 207. For a parallel passage in *IP*, see VI.i, 416-418.

[24] Reid, *IP*, V.iv, 373.

[25] Ibid., V.v, 388.

[26] Ibid., V.ii, 363.

[27] Ibid., VI.i, 416. Quotation from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. F. J. Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), I.7.

[28] Ibid., V.iii, 370, 371.

By "abstraction"[29] we "distinguish the different attributes which we know to belong to a subject." It is significant that here and elsewhere Reid states that by abstraction we distinguish "attributes which we *know* to belong to a subject."[30] In abstraction we do not become aware of an attribute of an object of which we previously had no notion, contra some Reid scholars.[31] We rather distinguish an attribute that we previously "knew," but only as an element of our gross and indistinct concept of some object. As an example of abstraction, Reid describes how when we perceive a sheet of paper, we can form a concept of "the whiteness of this sheet" by abstraction. This is an abstract concept, one abstracted from our indistinct concept of the concrete individual. But it is not a general concept; it is the concept of "an individual quality really existing," and applies only to this sheet of paper.[32] As with the acquisition of most other concepts,[33] the acquisition of distinct abstract concepts requires an act of judgment: "It is impossible to distinguish the different attributes belonging to the same subject, without judging that

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[29] That is, "abstraction, strictly so called." Reid notes that abstraction is frequently used in a general sense to refer to both abstraction and generalization (*IP*, V.iii, 365).

[30] When Reid initially introduces abstraction, he describes it as "[t]he resolving or analyzing a subject into its known attributes" (*IP*, V.iii, 365).

[31] This is *pace* Lehrer's claim that according to Reid "one initially confronts experiences as an undigested whole and that in order to obtain *any* [emphasis added] conception of the individual qualities one must focus attention on those qualities. This focusing of attention is what he calls *abstraction*. . . . Abstraction directs attention to an individual quality and yields a conception of it. . . . A conception of these qualities is and a belief in their existence is immediately occasioned once attention is directed toward the individual quality. This process is *abstraction*" (Lehrer, "Reid on Evidence and Conception," 131, 135, 139). According to Reid, by perception alone, prior to abstraction, we do have concepts of individual qualities in an object, but these concepts are indistinct. What abstraction yields is not a concept of a previously unconceived quality, but rather a *distinct* concept of a previously (indistinctly) conceived quality.

[32] Reid, *IP*, V.iii, 367.

[33] I say "most" because I am not certain whether Reid thinks that concepts "learned by a kind of induction" from others' usage of them require an act of judgment for their acquisition.

they are really different and distinguishable."[34] This is similar, for example, to the way Reid thinks we acquire the concept of hardness only through a tactile perception, where the perception involves not only a conception of a hard object but a judgment that deploys this concept. I believe, about the desk under my hand, that it is hard and exists, and in this perception I acquire the concept of hardness.

By the process of "generalizing"—which involves "judging that the same attribute does or may belong to many individuals"[35]—we form general abstract concepts.[36] For example, after forming the abstract concept of "the whiteness of this sheet," by generalizing we might form the concept of "whiteness."[37] This concept is general, and can be applied to various objects, real or imaginary. Through the operations of abstraction and generalization, we form our most simple concepts:[38] "by an intellectual analysis of objects, we form general conceptions of single attributes, (which of all

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[34] Reid, *IP*, VI.i, 413.

[35] Ibid. This passage suggests that generalization does not require observing and comparing multiple objects with the same attribute. Instead, generalizing requires only the judgment that the attribute in question "*may* belong to many individuals." This account of generalizing comes from Essay VI ("Of Judgment") of the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*. It is different from—and I think it is better than—the account Reid gives in Essay V, "Of Abstraction." Reid there defines generalizing as "the observing one or more attributes to be common to many subjects" (*IP*, V.iii, 366; see also V.iii, 365). This account of generalizing, unlike the one I quoted, requires observing at least two objects with the same attribute in order to form a general concept of that attribute. This requirement is unnecessary. For example, upon first perceiving an object of a new color—say, yellow—I can form not only an abstract but a general concept of yellow even if that is the only yellow object I ever perceive.

[36] Reid notes, "we cannot generalise without some degree of abstraction; but I apprehend we may abstract without generalising" (*IP*, V.iii, 365).

[37] Reid, *IP*, V.iii, 366–367.

[38] Reid seems to think that the outcome of abstraction is always some simple concept. It seems plausible, however, that we sometimes abstract a complex attribute from an object, after which we might further analyze this attribute into its simple components. For example, we might abstract the concept of "square" from our concept of a red wooden block that we are perceiving. Square is a complex concept, and we might later analyze it into its constitutive elements.

conceptions that enter into the human mind are the most simple)."[39] Once again, the acquisition of simple general concepts requires an act of judgment: "We cannot generalise, without judging that the same attribute does or may belong to many individuals."[40] According to Reid, we form many complex general concepts by combining simple general concepts. For example, someone can "conceive a plain surface, terminated by four equal straight lines meeting in four points at right angles. To this species of figure he gives the name of a square." Because these complex general concepts are formed through a process of "intellectual analysis," they are "very distinct."[41] Indeed, complex concepts formed wholly through combining simple concepts are "[o]ur most distinct complex notions."[42] This contrasts with the indistinct complex concepts of objects acquired in experience, as well as with the "somewhat vague and indistinct" complex general concepts "learned by a kind of induction, by observing to what individuals they are applied by those who understand the language."[43] As might be expected, the acquisition of distinct complex general concepts requires an act of judgment[44]:

> In those [notions] that are more complex, and which have been shewn to be formed by combining the more simple, there is another act of the judgment required; for such combinations are not made at random, but for an end; and

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[39] Reid, *IP*, V.iv, 373. There is a slight ambiguity in this quote, for the parenthetical portion can be read as referring either to "general conceptions of single attributes," or simply to "single attributes." Reid intends the former, as is clarified by a later statement: "our simplest general notions are formed by these two operations of distinguishing and generalising" (*IP*, VI.i, 413).

[40] Ibid., VI.i, 413.

[41] Ibid., V.iv, 373.

[42] Ibid., V.v, 388.

[43] Ibid., V.ii, 363.

[44] It should be noted that not all such judgments will be immediate. Only the immediate judgments can be judgments of common sense.

> judgment is employed in fitting them to that end. We form complex general notions for conveniency of arranging our thoughts in discourse and reasoning; and therefore, of an infinite number of combinations that might be formed, we chuse only those that are useful and necessary.[45]

In acquiring distinct complex general concepts, we judge that things with property *p* are *x*'s. To return to the example of a square, someone can "conceive a plain surface, terminated by four equal straight lines meeting in four points at right angles. To this species of figure he gives the name of a square." In this act of judgment, he acquires a distinct concept of a square, which is a distinct complex general concept. In stating that we "form complex general notions for conveniency" and that we "we chuse only those that are useful and necessary," Reid is not espousing a form of anti-realism according to which all our concepts are only pragmatic constructions for navigating our way through life. As Paul Wood notes, "Reid insisted that God had created distinct classes, genera and species, and had formed our minds so that we can discover these divisions. Far from being fictions . . . , taxonomic categories were for Reid rooted in the 'common sense' of mankind, and their validity was guaranteed by God's providential dispensation."[46]

At several points in essay V of the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid attributes abstraction and the formation of (many) general concepts, both simple and complex, to common sense. For example, according to Reid, "[T]he invention and the use of general words, both to signify the attributes of things, and to signify the *genera* and *species* of things, is not a subtile invention of Philosophers, but an operation which all men perform by the

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[45] Reid, *IP*, VI.i, 413.

[46] Paul Wood, "Introduction," in *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation: Papers Relating to the Life Sciences*, by Thomas Reid, ed. Paul Wood (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 5. For some relevant passages from Reid, see, for example, *IP*, V.iv, 380-381.

light of common sense."[47] Reid also clearly describes these conceptual functions of common sense in his "Curâ Primâ," although there he does not use the language of abstracting, and he uses the language of generalizing only twice. In one especially clear passage he writes,

> [T]he notions which we have immediately by our senses are neither simple nor are they accurate and well defined. They are gross and indistinct, a *rudis indigestaque moles* ["a course mass, void of order"], which in the furnace of common sense is digested, analysed, the heterogeneous parts separated and the simple ingredients which before lay hid in the common mass are distinctly discerned.[48]

By common sense sufficiently developed humans analyze the "gross and indistinct" concepts they have immediately by the senses, and thereby arrive at simple concepts that are both abstract and general. These simple general concepts can then be combined into clear and distinct complex general concepts. As already mentioned, not all complex general concepts are formed through the operations of common sense, but only those that are formed by an "immediate and intuitive judgment."

In addition to forming distinct general concepts, common sense is responsible for forming distinct concepts of the objects of experience. This holds for the objects of the

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[47] Reid, *IP*, V.i, 357. For passages in the *Intellectual Powers* where Reid similarly attributes the formation of abstract and general concepts to common sense, see V.iii, 366, 369; V.iv, 377-378; VI.iv, 466-467.

[48] Reid, "Curâ Primâ," 205; I have given the translation supplied by Norton. Interestingly, the language of this passage is extremely close to that found in a previously quoted passage from the *Intellectual Powers*. I am certain that Reid referred to the "Curâ Primâ" while preparing the *Intellectual Powers*. The relevant passage from the *Intellectual Powers* reads:

> [T]hese first notions are neither simple, nor are they accurate and distinct: They are gross and indistinct, and like the *chaos,* a *rudis indigestaque moles.* Before we can have any distinct notion of this mass, it must be analysed; the heterogeneous parts must be separated in our conception, and the simple elements, which before lay hid in the common mass, must first be distinguished, and then put together into one whole (*IP*, VI.i, 416–417).

The two documents contain numerous other parallel passages. Another good example occurs about half a page after the above passages in the *Intellectual Powers* and the "Curâ Primâ," where Reid has extended discussions about the differences between the way an adult and a child perceive a cube. I discuss this case below.

external senses, of consciousness, of conscience, of memory, and of reason. I will focus on the objects of the senses, both for simplicity and because Reid focuses on them and provides clear examples of them.

Insofar as we exercise merely our senses, our experiences are like those of small children and animals. By the senses alone small children and animals have concepts of objects, but these concepts are "gross and indistinct." By contrast,

> [T]he notions that men have even of the objects of sense are extremely different from those which brutes acquire of the same objects. The order, composition, and connexion of the parts is not discerned by brutes or infants; these are not objects of sense, though they are commonly taken to be so, but of higher powers of the mind, which brutes never acquire, and which children have not in infancy.[49]

In both the "Curâ Primâ" and the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid compares a child's and an adult's concept of a cube to explain how common sense alters our perceptions of objects. Both the child and the adult "have the senses of sight and of touch in equal perfection," and the differences of the adult's concept of the cube are therefore due solely to the operations of common sense.[50] The child's concept of the cube "may be clear in some sense, and it is so when the object is seen in a good light and with a good eye," but it is indistinct:

> In the idea of the child lines, planes and angles, surface and solid lie mingled, as it were, in one indistinguished heap. . . . It is not distinct because the different ingredients of which it is made up are not distinguished from one another, so that he cannot with any propriety be said to have a notion of any one of them but only of a certain medley that is made up of the whole. Such is the notion that the child has of the cube and such is the notion that the senses give of it.[51]

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[49] Reid, "Curâ Primâ," 192.

[50] Reid, *IP*, VI.i, 417.

[51] Reid, "Curâ Primâ," 207.

When an adult, however, "analys[es] the figure of the object presented to his senses into its simplest elements," and then "considers the cube as compounded of these elements, put together in a certain order, he has then, and not before, a distinct and scientific notion of a cube."[52] With his distinct and scientific concept of the cube, the adult "can easily distinguish the body from the surface which terminates it," and "can perceive, that this surface is made up of six planes of the same figure and magnitude; . . . that each of these planes has four equal sides, and four equal angles; and that the opposite sides of each plane, and the opposite planes are parallel."[53]

While common sense is responsible for the acquisition of many of our distinct concepts of external objects, the content of these concepts is given by the senses, just indistinctly. When the child perceives the cube, for example, his concept of the cube does involve "lines, planes and angles," but these are indistinct "ingredients" of a "mingled, . . . indistinguished heap." By the senses we have "a complex and confused notion of the whole"—a concrete, individual object—and mingled in this concept we have indistinct concepts of the qualities of the whole.[54] The fact that the senses do provide *some* concept of many of the properties of objects is significant, for this enables animals, children, and inattentive adults to respond to particular attributes of objects and perform many simple and important operations. For example, by the senses alone we may recognize resemblances:

> I believe indeed we may have an indistinct perception of resemblance, without knowing wherein it lies. Thus, I may see a resemblance between one face and another, when I cannot distinctly say in what feature they resemble: But by

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[52] Reid, *IP*, VI.i, 418.

[53] Ibid., VI.i, 417.

[54] Ibid., IV.iii, 327.

> analysing the two faces, and comparing feature with feature, I may form a distinct notion of that which is common to both. . . .
>
> There is therefore an indistinct notion of resemblance when we compare the objects only in gross; and this I believe brute animals may have. There is also a distinct notion of resemblance, when we analyse the objects into their different attributes, and perceive them to agree in some, while they differ in others. It is in this case only that we give a name to the attributes wherein they agree, which must be a common name, because the thing signified by it is common.[55]

By the senses we can recognize that two objects resemble each other. But without having distinct concepts of these two objects, we cannot have a distinct concept of their resemblance and the exact way(s) in which they resemble one other.

Common sense is responsible for the acquisition of various concepts and the original deployment of those concepts (they are both deployed and acquired in a judgment of common sense). But common sense need not be involved in subsequent deployments of those concepts. For example, after acquiring a distinct concept of a cube by analyzing a cube that we are perceiving, and perhaps similarly analyzing several cubes, we acquire the perceptual ability to form immediately a distinct conception of a cube and its qualities when we perceive a cube. We can now distinctly perceive a cube as a cube with its relevant qualities. Common sense is not involved in these distinct perceptions, though it is responsible for the acquisition of the distinct concepts deployed in them. Reid explains:

> In this way [i.e., by analyzing an object and then recombining its elements into a whole] it is that we form distinct notions even of the objects of sense; but this 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; and this we are the more prone to do, because, when once we have distinguished the sensible qualities of the object from one another, the sense gives testimony to each of them.

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[55] Ibid., V.vi, 403. This passage appears to conflict with Reid's later claim that "without judgment, we cannot have any notion of relations" (*IP*, VI.i, 420; see also 408).

> You perceive, for instance, an object white, round, and a foot in diameter: I grant that you perceive all these attributes of the object by sense; but if you had not been able to distinguish the colour from the figure, and both from the magnitude, your senses would only have given you one complex and confused notion of all these mingled together.[56]

By "habit," we acquire the perception of various distinct bodily qualities, after which "the sense gives testimony to each of them." Without the involvement of common sense, we can then perceive, for example, that an object is "white, round, and a foot in diameter."

These considerations of the conceptual functions of common sense help further explain the significance Reid attributes to this faculty. Not only is common sense responsible for intuitively judging of self-evident truths, but without common sense we would lack many of the concepts, and especially the distinct concepts, that we deploy in our distinctively human thoughts, actions, and perceptions. For example, without common sense we would lack the concepts of genera and species, and "it would be impossible to reduce things into any order and method, by dividing them into genera and species." Since according to Reid definitions apply only to universals and we acquire universal concepts through common sense, it follows that without common sense we could neither form nor employ definitions. Finally, Reid thinks that without the abstract and general concepts of common sense, "there can neither be reasoning nor language."[57] Without general concepts and words, we could neither conceive of nor express propositions, and we would lack "clear and distinct conceptions of things, which are the only fit materials for reasoning."[58]

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[56] Ibid., VI.i, 417.

[57] Ibid., V.v, 388.

[58] Ibid., V.i, 356; VI.i, 414.

2. The Principles of Common Sense

The principles of common sense (PCS) are frequently discussed and referred to in the Reid literature, and clearly they are important in Reid's philosophy. Surprisingly, Reid uses the exact phrase "principle(s) of common sense" very few times. In the *Inquiry*, Reid uses this phrase only seven times; in the *Intellectual Powers*, only thrice; and in the *Active Powers*, only once.[59] Reid sometimes uses alternate phrases, such as "dictate(s) of common sense,"[60] and in many places it is more or less clear from the context that he is discussing principles of common sense. Reid's discussions of the principles of common sense are much more confusing than his discussions of the faculty of common sense. As a methodological point, I have therefore begun by considering what Reid means by common sense, and I will draw from these considerations to help elucidate what he means by the principles of common sense.

Part of the confusion regarding Reid's understanding of the principles of common sense is due to the fact that he refers to them with a variety of phrases, including "first principles." This phrase in particular creates confusion. Principles of common sense that are believed and believed due to their self-evidence are first principles in the sense of things believed non-inferentially. Moreover, Reid seems to think that many adults actually entertain and believe most principles of common sense. So for many people, most principles of common sense are a subset of first principles. This explains and to an extent justifies Reid referring to principles of common sense as first principles. However,

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[59] I arrived at these (and similar) numbers based on word searches of the texts of Reid's works that I converted into searchable documents. Due to the occasional error of the text conversion software, it is possible, though unlikely, that there are a few more occurrences of this phrase than I found. It should be noted that these figures are for the number of times Reid uses this *exact* phrase, with no intervening words.

[60] This phrase is only slightly more common than "principle(s) of common sense." It occurs four times in the *Inquiry*, nine times in the *Intellectual Powers*, and once in the *Active Powers*.

the principles of common sense are not properly speaking a subset of first principles. Contrary to many commentators, Reid does not claim the principles of common sense are actually believed by all competent adults. His key claim is that the principles of common sense, being self-evident, are commonly *accessible* as first principles: If a competent adult were clearly to understand a principle of common sense, she would immediately believe it. As we will see, this important clarification resolves a number of interpretative and philosophical problems.

I argue Reid has a dual understanding of the principles of common sense. According to the first line of thought mentioned above, the PCS are principles that are self-evident to (but not necessarily entertained and believed by) what I call epistemically competent adults. As regards the self-evidence of the PCS, I contend, contra Alston and Van Cleve, that Reid does not confuse self-evident with immediately evident. According to the second line of thought, the PCS are things that epistemically competent adults take for granted, or presuppose, in their everyday lives. I conclude by contrasting my interpretation of the PCS with Wolterstorff's and arguing that Reid's two lines of thought, while different, are not incompatible: the PCS are things that are *both* self-evident to and taken for granted by epistemically competent adults.

2.1. In What Sense Are the Principles of Common Sense "Principles"?

A fundamental question is how we should understand "principles" in "the principles of common sense." Which, if any, of the senses of "principle" discussed in chapter 2 is operative in this phrase? In an important passage from the *Inquiry*, Reid writes,

> If there are certain principles, as I think there are, [1] which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and [2] which we are under a necessity to take for

> granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd.[61]

The two clauses in this passage suggest two possible understandings of the principles of common sense. According to the first, they are "principles . . . which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe." The principles of common sense are principles in the sense of *things believed.* And since our constitution leads us to believe them non-inferentially, they are first principles. This is a rough first approximation which will require some refinement. For now, it is sufficient to note that, on a careful reading of the above passage, it does not say that these principles are things that we all actually *do* believe. While Reid seems to think most adults eventually do believe many, if not most, of the principles of common sense, all Reid says in the above passage is that the principles of common sense are things "which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe." It is possible that our constitution dispositionally "leads us to believe" certain principles, but only in certain situations, such as when we clearly understand them. It is therefore possible for someone not to believe—not yet to believe—what her constitution leads her to believe.

The above block quote suggests a second understanding of the principles of common sense: they are things "which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them." A key question is how we should understand "take for granted." Reid sometimes uses this phrase to mean something like *believe or accept non-inferentially, without proof*. For instance, in a chapter entitled "Principles taken for granted," Reid writes, "I conceive it may be useful,

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[61] Reid, *Inquiry*, II.vi, 33.

to point out some of those things which I shall take for granted, as first principles in treating of the mind and its faculties." A few pages later he writes, "That every act or operation, therefore, supposes an agent, that every quality supposes a subject, are things which I do not attempt to prove, but take for granted."[62] "Taking for granted" is here contrasted with proving. If Reid is using "take for granted" in this sense in the above block quote, then the second clause of the definition is qualifying what he has already said in the first clause, but it is not a distinct line of thought. By "and [2] which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them," Reid means, "and [2] which we are under a necessity to *believe non-inferentially* in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them." However, Reid sometimes uses "take for granted" in the sense of *presuppose* or *assume*: "Mr Hume, in his Treatise of Human Nature, has examined [these arguments offered "to prove, that things which begin to exist must have a cause"]; and, in my opinion, has shewn, that they take for granted the thing to be proved."[63] In this sense of *presuppose*, something may be taken for granted without even being conceived of, much less believed. For instance, a child takes for granted the reliability of her perceptual faculties during her daily activities and interactions with others, yet she may never have considered whether her faculties are reliable. She may not even possess the conceptual resources needed to conceive of, much less believe in, the reliability of her faculties. If Reid is using "take for granted" in this second sense, then the above block quote contains two very different lines of thought regarding the principles of common sense. They are

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[62] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 41, 44.

[63] Ibid., VI.vi, 498.

principles "[1] which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and [2] which we are under a necessity to take for granted"—i.e., assume—"in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them."

In his interpretation of the above block quote, Nicholas Wolterstorff assumes it is unproblematic and obvious that Reid is using "take for granted" in the sense of *assume* or *presuppose*.[64] However, given that both senses of "take for granted" make sense in the above passage, and given that Reid often—indeed, I would say usually—uses "take for granted" in the sense of *believe non-inferentially, without proof*, Wolterstorff's interpretation is not obviously correct. While I ultimately agree with Wolterstorff's reading, I do so primarily on the basis of other passages that more clearly support this understanding of the principles of common sense as things that we assume in our daily lives.

For now, it suffices to note that Reid seems to have two distinct lines of thought regarding the principles of common sense. Roughly, the principles of common sense are principles that (1) our constitution leads us to believe and that (2) we must assume or presuppose in our everyday lives. I will consider each of these lines of thought individually, and then consider their relation to one another and whether they can be reconciled in a unified account of the principles of common sense.

2.2. The Principles of Common Sense as Self-Evident Principles

As a fairly rough first approximation, the principles of common sense are principles in the sense of *things believed*, or somewhat more precisely, things that our

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[64] Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 223–225.

constitution leads us to believe.[65] To begin specifying which of these "things believed" count as principles *of common sense*, it is helpful to return to Reid's definition of the faculty of common sense:

> We ascribe to reason two offices, or two degrees. The first is to judge of things self-evident; the second to draw conclusions that are not self-evident from those that are. The first of these is the province, and the sole province of common sense.[66]

Reid clearly states that "the province, and the sole province of common sense" is "to judge of things self-evident." If (1) the principles of common sense are things judged, or believed, by common sense; and (2) the province and sole province of common sense is to judge of "things self-evident," it follows that (3) all the principles of common sense are "things self-evident." The principles of common sense are self-evident principles. This is how Reid identifies the PCS in one of his unpublished manuscripts: "what I understand by principles of common sense or first principles, namely propositions which have their evidence in themselves and which do not derive their evidence from some other proposition upon which they rest and from which they are deduced or inferred."[67]

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[65] I will later consider the relation of some principles of common sense to certain scientific principles. As a faculty, common sense will clearly involve constitutional principles—that is, certain laws of our constitution. While there are some passages where Reid seems to slip between using "principle" in the sense of something believed and in this constitutional sense, in the context of common sense "principle" is generally used in the sense of something believed.

[66] Reid, *IP*, VI.ii, 432–433. Earlier in the same section Reid similarly writes, "The same degree of understanding which makes a man capable of acting with common prudence in the conduct of life, makes him capable of discovering what is true and what is false in matters that are self-evident, and which he distinctly apprehends. All knowledge, and all science, must be built upon principles that are self-evident; and of such principles, every man who has common sense is a competent judge, when he conceives them distinctly" (*IP*, VI.ii, 426).

[67] Ms. 2/III/9; quoted in David Fate Norton, "Appendix: Thomas Reid's Curâ Primâ on Common Sense," in *Claude Buffier and Thomas Reid: Two Common-Sense Philosophers*, by Louise Marcil-Lacoste (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982), 185.

2.2.1. The "self-evidence" of the principles of common sense. A key question is what Reid means by "self-evident." According to William Alston, Reid confuses "self-evident (evident on merely understanding the proposition), and immediately (directly) evident, evident not on the basis of support from other propositions believed or known."[68] James Van Cleve follows Alston in accusing Reid of failing to distinguish between "self-evident proper" and "immediately evident."[69] Similar to Alston and Van Cleve, Wolterstorff thinks Reid is confused regarding self-evidence, and Robert Stecker claims that by self-evident Reid means immediately evident, or "knowable without inference."[70] While I agree with Alston and Van Cleve that Reid occasionally seems to use "self-evident" to mean immediately evident,[71] I do not think Reid is confused on this issue. The principles of common sense are self-evident, and by self-evident Reid generally means self-evident, not immediately evident. Furthermore, the instances of Reid's careless misuse of "self-evident" are far fewer than Alston and Van Cleve suggest.

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[68] William Alston, "Thomas Reid on Epistemic Principles," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1985): 440. Alston concedes that "Reid understood this [distinction] well enough in practice" (ibid.), and perhaps "sometimes in profession as well" (ibid., 449 note 20).

[69] James Van Cleve, "Reid on the First Principles of Contingent Truths," *Reid Studies* 3, no. 1 (1999): 4.

[70] Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 220–223 (see my footnote 100); Robert Stecker, "Thomas Reid on the Moral Sense," *The Monist* 70, no. 4 (1987): 455–456.

[71] For example, Reid writes, "The truths that fall within the compass of human knowledge, whether they be self-evident, or deduced from those that are self-evident, may be reduced to two classes. They are either necessary and immutable truths, whose contrary is impossible, or they are contingent and mutable, depending upon some effect of will and power, which had a beginning, and may have an end" (*IP*, VI.v, 468). This passage suggests that all truths that humans know are either self-evident or deduced from self-evident truths. Since perceptual truths, such as the existence of the coffee mug on my desk, are not deduced, this suggests that Reid is here using "self-evident" to mean "immediately evident." I am aware of two similar passages. See *IP*, VI.iv, 455, and VI.vii, 522.

The following is a key passage cited by both Alston and Van Cleve to show Reid's purported confusion[72]:

> But there are other propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed. The judgment follows the apprehension of them necessarily, and both are equally the work of nature, and the result of our original powers. There is no searching for evidence, no weighing of arguments; the proposition is not deduced or inferred from another; it has the light of truth in itself, and no occasion to borrow it from another.
>
> Propositions of the last kind, when they are used in matters of science, have commonly been called *axioms*; and on whatever occasion they are used, are called *first principles, principles of common sense, common notions, self-evident truths*.[73]

In reference to this passage, Alston writes, "[T]he category of first principles is introduced, in the *Essays*, precisely as those judgments that are self-evident."[74] Also in reference to this passage, Van Cleve similarly claims that "Reid affirms the self-evidence

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[72] This is the only passage cited by Alston in support of his claim that Reid confuses "self-evident" and "immediately evident." Van Cleve quotes two additional passages. Both are drawn from Reid's discussion of "Opinions ancient and modern about first principles," and it is somewhat unclear to what extent we should consider them Reid's own carefully stated opinion rather than Reid's statement of others' opinions. One of the passages quoted by Van Cleve does not even suggest that Reid is confused on this point. When quoted in context and in full, it reads,

> As to the evidence of our own existence, and of the existence of a first cause, Mr Locke does not say whether it rests upon first principles or not. But it is manifest, from what he has said upon both, that it does.
>
> With regard to our own existence, says he, we perceive it so plainly, and so certainly, that it neither needs nor is capable of any proof. This is as much as to say, that our own existence is a first principle; for it is applying to this truth the very definition of a first principle (*IP*, VI.vii, 522).

This passage mentions only first principles, and says nothing about self-evidence. Whatever support it appears to lend to Van Cleve's interpretation rest upon his misidentification of Reid's first principles with Reid's principles of common sense (see my footnote 80). The other passage Van Cleve quotes, which comes immediately before the above passage, reads:

> It is demonstrable, and was long ago demonstrated by Aristotle, that every proposition to which we give a rational assent, must either have its evidence in itself, or derive it from some antecedent proposition. And the same thing may be said of the antecedent proposition. As therefore we cannot go back to antecedent propositions without end, the evidence must at last rest upon propositions, one or more, which have their evidence in themselves, that is, upon first principles (*IP*, VI.vii, 522; for a very similar passage, see *IP*, VI.iv, 455).

I concede that this passage does seem to confuse self-evident and immediately evident.

[73] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 452.

[74] Alston, "Reid on Epistemic Principles," 439.

of first principles."[75] According to both Alston and Van Cleve, Reid here claims that all first principles are self-evident. But, as Alston and Van Cleve correctly note, not all first principles are self-evident. For example, consider a perceptual first principle, such as the existence of the coffee mug on my desk. This is not self-evident, but only immediately evident. Alston and Van Cleve conclude that Reid is confused: he asserts that first principles are self-evident, but clearly some first principles are not self-evident.

Alston and Van Cleve misinterpret the above passage. It begins by speaking of "propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed"—that is, propositions that Alston and Van Cleve would call "self-evident proper." It then states that such propositions "are called *first principles, principles of common sense, common notions, self-evident truths*." Reid's claim is that all "propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed" are "*first principles, principles of common sense, common notions, self-evident truths.*" For Alston and Van Cleve's claim that Reid thinks all first principles are self-evident to follow from this passage, one of two things would have to be the case. First, it would have to be the case that Reid claimed all "*first principles* . . ." are "propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed."[76] This is not, however, what Reid claims, but rather the converse of it. Alternately, the final listing might support Alston and Van Cleve's claim if it indicated that *first principles* and *self-evident truths* are synonymous and interchangeable, and

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[75] Van Cleve, "Reid on First Principles," 4.

[76] It would also have to be the case the Reid was using "first principles" in the sense of "things believed immediately," since this is the sense of "first principles" with which Alston and Van Cleve are concerned.

hence first principles are self-evident.[77] However, the passage gives no reason to think this. It merely states that "propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed" "are called *first principles, . . . self-evident truths*." This does not indicate that all first principles are self-evident truths, just as stating that beagles are called dogs and hounds does not indicate that all dogs are hounds. Given my interpretation of Reid, according to which self-evident truths are (roughly) a subset of first principles,[78] there is nothing surprising about the above passage: "propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed" are correctly called first principles, for they are believed immediately; and they are also correctly (and more precisely) called self-evident truths, for they are believed immediately and as a result of being understood.

Other passages suggest Reid maintains this distinction between first principles and self-evident truths. The following passage, for instance, suggests that Reid distinguishes self-evident from immediately evident, and recognizes that perceptual beliefs, while immediately evident, are not self-evident: "It is, no doubt, one thing to have an immediate conviction of a self-evident axiom; it is another thing to have an immediate conviction of the existence of what we see; but the conviction is equally immediate and equally irresistible in both cases."[79] Reid does not claim that both beliefs are self-evident, but that both are immediately evident. Moreover, if Reid does not distinguish immediately evident from self-evident, then the phrase "an immediate conviction of a

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[77] See footnote 76.

[78] More precisely, self-evident truths that are both believed and believed (at least in part) based on their self-evidence are a subset of first principles, understood as things believed non-inferentially. Assuming Reid is using "first principle" in this sense, he is somewhat confused in this passage, though not in the way suggested by Alston and Van Cleve. Reid should say that self-evident truths are called first principles *when they are believed and believed (at least in part) based on their self-evidence.*

[79] Reid, *IP*, II.v, 99–100. Emphasis added.

self-evident axiom" is oddly redundant. But if self-evident means immediately evident *upon understanding the proposition*, then the phrases is not redundant: Reid is comparing two beliefs are regards their immediacy, even though they differ as regards self-evidence.

Contra Alston and Van Cleve, it is false that for Reid "the defining mark of a first principle is its self-evidence."[80] Alston and Van Cleve have not provided a good reason to think Reid confuses "self-evident" and "immediately evident," and I have given reasons to think he does not confuse these terms. Reid understands the principles of common sense as principles that are self-evident to someone with common sense, where "self-evident" is understood as follows: "Self-evident propositions are those which appear evident to every man of sound understanding who apprehends the meaning of them distinctly, and attends to them without prejudice."[81] When believed based on their self-evidence, the principles of common sense are a subset of first principles. Like other first principles, they are immediately evident; but unlike other first principles, they are also self-evident.

Two objections might be raised to my claim that Reid generally maintains a clear distinction between immediately evident and self-evident. I respond to these objections in the following several pages.

2.2.1.1. First objection countered – The title of the chapter that contains the above key passage quoted by Alston and Van Cleve seems to provide material for another

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[80] Van Cleve, "Reid on First Principles," 4. Van Cleve's footnote to this sentence further shows that he is confusing principles of common sense with first principles: "Reid lists other traits of first principles as well (e.g., universal consent among mankind), but none seems to me have as good a claim to be the defining mark" ("Reid on First Principles," 26 note 8). Universal consent is a mark not of first principles, but of principles of common sense.

[81] Reid, *IP*, II.x, 141–142.

argument that Reid seriously confuses self-evident and immediately evident. The title of this chapter is "Of first Principles in General." It might be argued that since this chapter is about "first principles in general," Reid is confused when he says they "are called *first principles, principles of common sense, common notions, self-evident truths*"; and more generally, whenever Reid mentions "self-evident propositions" in this chapter, he confuses first principles—principles that are immediately evident—with principles that are not only immediately evident, but self-evident.

In response, it should be kept in mind that Reid uses "first principles" in various senses. For the above argument to work, we must read "first principles," both in the heading and the body of this chapter, as referring in general to "things believed non-inferentially." However, Reid also uses "first principles" to refer to both the principles of common sense and to the first principles of a science. According to Reid, many scientific first principles are not only immediately evident, but self-evident, and a subset of the principles of common sense. I contend that in the chapter "Of first Principles in General," Reid should be read as using "first principles" in this scientific sense, or at least in the sense of principles of common sense. As a result, the above objection is based on an equivocal use of "first principles." There are three pieces of evidence that in the chapter "Of first Principles in General" Reid is discussing principles of common sense, or perhaps more specifically, scientific first principles. The first piece of evidence is a passage from the *Active Powers*; the second comes from chapter ii of essay I in the *Intellectual Powers*; and the third is evidence internal to "Of first Principles in General."

Chapter i of essay V in the *Active Powers* is entitled "Of the First Principles of Morals." The first sentence of this chapter shows that it is concerned with scientific first

principles: "Morals, like all other sciences, must have first principles, on which all moral reasoning is grounded." Reid refers to these scientific first principles as self-evident, and notes that disagreements concerning them are resolved by appealing to common sense.[82] He immediately proceeds as follows: "How the genuine *decisions of common sense* may be distinguished from the counterfeit, has been considered in essay sixth, on the Intellectual Powers of Man, chapter fourth"—that is, in "Of first Principles in General."[83] According to Reid, "Of first Principles in General" is not about first principles in the sense of anything believed immediately. This chapter is rather focused on the "decisions of common sense," or first principles of common sense. Consequently, Reid is not confused in this chapter when he discusses the self-evidence of first principles. He is discussing first principles *of common sense*, and these are self-evident.

The second piece of evidence comes from the beginning of the *Intellectual Powers*, in chapter ii ("Principles taken for granted") of essay I ("Preliminary"). This chapter provides the background for essay VI ("Of Judgment"), and particularly for chapter iv-vi of that essay ("Of first Principles in General," "The first Principles of contingent Truths," and "First Principles of necessary Truths"). In "Principles taken for granted," Reid makes a promissory note to reexamine the first principles of the science of the mind. As I will show, he fulfills this promissory note in essay VI, particularly in chapters iv-vi. This shows that Reid understands "Of first Principles in General" to be concerned with principles of common sense, and more specifically, with those principles of common sense that are scientific first principles.

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[82] Reid, *AP*, V.i, 270.

[83] Ibid. Emphasis added.

Reid's discussion in "Principles taken for granted" is clearly situated within the context of scientific inquiry. He begins by noting there are "common principles"—principles of common sense—"which are the foundation . . . of all science." These are self-evident principles, principles which "all men of common understanding know; or such, at least, as they give a ready assent to, as soon as they are proposed and understood." Reid comments that such principles, when used in a science, "are called *axioms*."[84] This passage closely parallels the passage from "Of first Principles in General" quoted by Alston and Van Cleve as an illustration of Reid's purported confusion of immediately evident with self-evident.[85] In both passages Reid begins by noting there are self-evident propositions, ones "which are no sooner understood than they are believed." In both passages Reid proceeds to note that such principles, "when they are used in matters of science, have commonly been called *axioms*." These two passages are parallel, and their parallels extend even beyond these points.[86] In both passages, Reid is concerned with scientific principles.

The passage from "Principles taken for granted" proceeds to note that "it may be of great use, to point out the principles or axioms on which a science is grounded."[87] This is particularly important because "what is really a first principle may, by the enchantment of words, have such a mist thrown about it, as to hide its evidence, and to make a man of candour doubt of it. Such cases happen more frequently perhaps in this science [i.e., "of

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[84] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 39.

[85] Ibid., VI.iv, 452.

[86] Ibid., I.ii, 41; Vi.iv, 453–454.

[87] Ibid., I.ii, 39.

the mind and its faculties"] than in any other." Reid is here discussing first principles of a science. He proceeds:

> There are ways by which the evidence of first principles may be made more apparent when they are brought into dispute; but they require to be handled in a way peculiar to themselves. Their evidence is not demonstrative, but intuitive. They require not proof, but to be placed in a proper point of view. *This will be shown more fully in its proper place, and applied to those very principles which we now assume*. In the mean time, when they are proposed as first principles, the reader is put on his guard, and warned to consider whether they have a just claim to that character.[88]

Reid proceeds to list eight "principles taken for granted."

Two things should be noted here. First, there is significant, though not exact, overlap between the eight principles Reid lists here and the principles of contingent and necessary truths that Reid lists in chapters v-vi of essay VI.[89] In the essay "Preliminary," Reid seems be giving a preliminary list of the principles of this science—a list he will develop in essay VI ("Of Judgment"). Second, Reid says, in the context of speaking about "this science," "There are ways by which the evidence of first principles may be made more apparent when they are brought into dispute," and that "[t]his will be shown more fully in its proper place, and applied to those very principles which we now assume." This is exactly what Reid proceeds to do in much of "Of first Principles in General." In a passage very similar to the above block quote, Reid writes,

> It is likewise a question of some moment, whether the differences among men about first principles can be brought to any issue? When, in disputes, one man maintains that to be a first principle, which another denies, commonly both parties appeal to common sense, and so the matter rests. Now, is there no way of discussing this appeal? Is there no mark or criterion, whereby first principles that

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[88] Ibid., I.ii, 41. Emphasis added

[89] For example, the first "principle taken for granted" reappears as the first of the principles of contingent truths; the second reappears as the third principle of contingent truths; the fourth reappears as the second and fourth principles of contingent truths; and the fifth reappears under the sixth category of the principles of necessary truths.

> are truly such, may be distinguished from those that assume the character without a just title? I shall humbly offer in the following propositions what appears to me to be agreeable to truth in these matters, always ready to change my opinion upon conviction.[90]

"Of first Principles in General" fulfills the promissory note given in "Principles taken for granted." While much of what it says may apply to "first principles" in the general sense of things believed non-inferentially, this chapter is specifically concerned with a subset of those things believed non-inferentially—namely, the first principles of the science of the mind and its faculties. These scientific first principles are self-evident truths, and a subset of the principles of common sense. In summary, connections between "Principles taken for granted" and "Of first Principles in General" show that "Of first Principles in General" is concerned with scientific first principles, and not first principles in the sense of anything believed non-inferentially. As a result, it does not follow that Reid's use of "first principles," both in the title of this chapter and within it, indicates a confusion of immediately evident with self-evident.

There is also evidence within "Of first Principles in General" that Reid is there concerned with scientific first principles, and not with first principles in the general sense of things believed non-inferentially. First, Reid makes several statements that suggest he is specifically concerned with *scientific* first principles. For example, in the passage quoted by Alston and Van Cleve, Reid writes, "Propositions of the last kind, when they are used in matters of *science* [emphasis added], have commonly been called *axioms*; and on whatever occasion they are used, are called *first principles, principles of common*

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[90] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 454.

sense, common notions, self-evident truths."[91] Second, as noted in chapter 2, according to Reid the thing believed in many of our non-inferential beliefs is not a proposition, though our beliefs may be expressed in a proposition. In perceiving a bird, I typically do not believe the proposition "there is a bird." I rather believe, about the bird, that it exists.[92] As Reid repeatedly says, such perceptual beliefs can be expressed in propositions, but the thing believed is not a proposition. It is correct, however, that all the first principles of a science are propositions. Keeping this in mind, it is significant that in "Of first Principles in General" Reid is clearly concerned with *propositions*, and not generically with things believed. He frequently refers to *propositions* throughout the chapter. Indeed, in the first one and a half pages, he uses the word "proposition" six times, and always in the context of discussing self-evidence.[93] This strongly suggests that in this chapter Reid is not concerned with all non-inferential beliefs, but only with the belief of self-evident propositions.

The evidence in the *Active Powers*, in "Principles taken for granted," and within "Of first Principles in General" shows that in "Of first Principles in General" Reid is concerned with *scientific* first principles. Hence, when he there describes first principles as self-evident, he is not confusing self-evident with immediately evident. According to Reid, scientific first principles are self-evident, and a subset of the principles of common sense.

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[91] Several additional passages could be cited in support of this claim. For three such passages, see *IP*, VI.iv, 457; VI.iv, 459; and VI.iv, 466-467.

[92] I borrow the language for describing this phenomenon from Wolterstorff. See Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 4.

[93] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 452–453.

2.2.1.2. Second objection countered – There remains one significant and initially plausible objection to my interpretation of the principles of common sense and my claim that Reid maintains a fairly clear distinction between immediately evident and self-evident. As I have shown, common sense plays an important role in the acquisition of certain distinct concepts. When we acquire these concepts via common sense, it is in a *judgment* of common sense. For example, in the judgment that the whiteness of this sheet of paper is distinct from its other attributes, such as its size and shape, I acquire a distinct, abstract concept of the whiteness of this paper. Surely, it may be objected, these judgments of common sense—judgments in which we acquire a distinct concept—are not judgments "of things self-evident," but of things that are only immediately evident. Hence, Reid is mistaken in his official statement that "the province, and the sole province of common sense" is "to judge of things self-evident." In this key passage, Reid makes a false claim, or at least seriously confuses "self-evident" with "immediately evident."

In response to this objection, it is first necessary to recall the distinction between concept acquisition and concept deployment. Once distinct concepts, such as that of whiteness, have been acquired in judgments of common sense, they can be deployed in acquired perceptions without the involvement of common sense. Since common sense is not involved in such deployments, they do not present an objection to Reid's claim that "the sole province of common sense" is "to judge of things self-evident." For example, it is immediately evident to me, but not self-evident, that there is a white book on my bookshelf. Or to come at is slightly differently, it is immediately evident, but not self-evident, that the book on my shelf is white. The formation of these perceptual beliefs does not directly involve common sense. Their formation involves only the deployment,

via acquired perceptual powers, of concepts acquired via judgments of common sense. So these perceptions are not counterexamples to Reid's claim that common sense judges only of things self-evident.

But the distinct concepts acquired by common sense are both acquired and deployed in a judgment of common sense. Hence, judgments of common sense are involved in at least the acquisition of distinct concepts, even if they are not subsequently involved in the deployment of those concepts. The question, then, is this: In the judgments of common sense responsible for the acquisition of distinct concepts, are the things believed only immediately evident? Or are they also self-evident?[94] If they are not also self-evident, then it is not the case that "the province, and the sole province of common sense" is "to judge of things self-evident."

To resolve this issue, we must consider the exact nature of the thing believed in such judgments of common sense. Common sense is responsible for the acquisition of distinct concepts through a process of intellectual analysis. Significantly, what is analyzed is not an external object—or at least, not directly. It is rather our gross and indistinct *concept* of the object. Reid cites this as a key difference between "chemical analysis" and "intellectual analysis":

> In the chemical analysis, the compound body itself is the subject analysed. . . .
> If we consider the intellectual analysis of an object, . . . the thing analysed is not an external object imperfectly known; it is a conception of the mind itself. And to suppose that there can be any thing in a conception that is not conceived, is a contradiction.[95]

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[94] Recall that according to Reid propositions are self-evident if they "appear evident to every man of sound understanding who apprehends the meaning of them distinctly, and attends to them without prejudice" (*IP*, II.x, 142).

[95] Reid, *IP*, V.iii, 370, 371.

We intellectually analyze *intellectual* objects, or concepts. By common sense I intellectually analyze my gross and indistinct concept of the sheet of paper in front of me, and not the sheet of paper itself. In this intellectual analysis, I distinguish certain concepts from others that are contained in my gross and indistinct concept of the whole. In forming the abstract concept of the whiteness of this paper, I might, for instance, judge that the concept of the whiteness of the paper is distinct from the concepts of the shape and the size of the paper. In forming the general concept of whiteness, I might judge that "whiteness" is an attribute which may belong to other objects besides this sheet of paper. In all these judgments, common sense does not tell me, about the external object, that it is white. This is a deliverance of my visual perception, albeit only as an element of my gross and indistinct perceptual concept of the paper. Common sense tells me, about my concept of the object, that whiteness is distinct from other attributes in my concept of the object, and that whiteness may be deployed in other complex concepts; it is a universal, and attributable to other objects. My external senses tell me, at first confusedly but now, upon intellectual analysis, distinctly, that there exists a white paper in front of me.

To approach the topic slightly differently, recall that there are two elements of a perception: a concept of an external object, and a belief in the present existence of this object. The perceptual belief is not self-evident; that there exists a sheet of paper in front of me is "of such a nature that a man of ripe understanding may apprehend [it] distinctly, and perfectly understand [its] meaning without finding himself under any necessity of believing [it] to be true or false, probable or improbable."[96] It is, however, *immediately*

[96] Ibid., VI.iv, 452.

evident that there is a sheet of paper in front of me.[97] By common sense I analyze my gross and indistinct perceptual concept of the sheet of paper. This is the concept deployed in my perceptual belief that the object so conceived presently exists. (It might be helpful to keep in mind that by common sense I might similarly intellectually analyze concepts of imaginary objects, such as unicorns—concepts which are only conceived, and not deployed in perceptual beliefs.) By common sense I can *abstract* different concepts from my concept of the concrete object. For instance, I might judge that my concept of the whiteness of the sheet of paper is different from my concept of the size and shape of the paper. By common sense I can further *generalize* from my concept of the whiteness of this paper to the concept of whiteness. In forming this general concept I might judge, for instance, that my concept of whiteness is such that it can be an element of other concepts, and not just an element of my concept of this paper. But common sense does not perceptually deploy the concepts it is responsible for acquiring; by common sense I do not judge, *of the external object*, that it is white, or that there exists a white object. These are judgments of my external senses, as conceptually clarified by common sense.

The judgments of common sense in which it analyzes the concepts deployed in our perceptual beliefs are analytic. In these judgments, common sense is merely distinguishing and clarifying, by an intellectual analysis, what is contained indistinctly as elements in our perceptual concepts. Similar to the way an analysis of my concept of a triangle reveals the concept of a line as one of its elements, so an analysis of my concept of a specific sheet of paper reveals that the concept of whiteness is one of its (previously indistinct) conceptual elements. Because the judgments of common sense involved in

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[97] Obviously, for this to be immediately evident it is necessary that I have acquired various perceptual powers.

intellectual analysis are analytic and non-inferential, they are self-evident.[98] Admittedly, other people may not have immediate access to a particular perceptual concept involved in one of my judgments of common sense. Perhaps it requires a particular perceptual experience to which they do not have access. But if they did have my gross and indistinct perceptual concept, say, of the sheet of paper in front of me, then it would be self-evident to them that it is a concept of a *white* sheet of paper.

In this section I have considered the following objection: The judgments of common sense in which we acquire distinct concepts, particularly of external objects, are not judgments "of things self-evident," but of things that are only immediately evident. Hence, so the objection goes, it is false that common sense judges only of things self-evident. In response, I have shown that according to Reid common sense does not judge, about an external object, that it has a certain property. That would be a perceptual judgment. Common sense is rather responsible for an intellectual analysis of our *concepts* of external objects. It is responsible for analyzing and distinguishing the conceptual elements of our perceptual beliefs about external objects. Even though it is neither analytic nor self-evident that there is a white paper in front of me, it is analytic and self-evident that "white" is an element of my concept of the paper in front of me. It is likewise analytic and self-evident that my concept of the whiteness of the paper is distinct from my concept of its shape. Hence, even in those judgments of common sense responsible for acquiring distinct concepts of external objects, it remains the case that common sense judges only "of things self-evident."

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[98] While (many) analytic and necessary truths are self-evident, it should be kept in mind that according to Reid many self-evident truths are neither analytic nor necessary.

2.2.2. The commonness of the principles of common sense. Reid clearly thinks the principles of common sense are in some sense *common*. But it is difficult to identify exactly what this commonness consists in. According to Wolterstorff, Reid has two distinct lines of thought regarding the principles of common sense and their commonness. According to the first, they are things we all believe (this is similar to the line of thought I am now pursuing); and according to the second, they are things we all take for granted.[99] I will return to Wolterstorff's discussion of "taking for granted" and his argument that Reid's two lines of thought are incompatible, but for now I wish to focus on his interpretation of Reid's first line of thought. According to Wolterstorff, Reid understands the principles of common sense as "a certain subset of immediate and justifiedly held beliefs; they are those of such beliefs which are shared by all."[100] The "principles of Common Sense are *common*," and their commonness consists in their being *believed* by everyone.[101]

Reid does think that most of a certain subset of humans—let us call them *epistemically competent adults*—do believe most of the principles of common sense. I

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[99] Wolterstorff, *Reid*, chapter 9; see also Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense." The essay "Reid on Common Sense" (in *Practices of Belief*) is based on Wolterstorff's chapter in *Reid*. While what Wolterstorff says about common sense in *Practices of Belief* is somewhat different from his earlier book chapter, his views on the points I discuss here are largely the same. I will interact primarily with Wolterstorff's earlier chapter in *Reid*.

[100] Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 223. This is Wolterstorff's eventual interpretation of Reid's first understanding of the principles of common sense. He begins by noting that Reid understands the principles of common sense as "things self-evident," but similar to Alston and Van Cleve, he thinks Reid is confused regarding self-evidence. Wolterstorff's argument to this effect goes wrong at two key points. First, he seems to be attached to the "traditional concept of the self-evident," according to which "the concept of *a self-evidently true proposition* applies only to necessary truths" (ibid., 221). Second, I submit that the passage he takes as representative of Reid's view is actually one of those passages where Reid is speaking imprecisely regarding self-evidence. The passage is from *IP*, VI.vii, 522 (Wolterstorff misidentifies it as being from VI.viii; see Wolterstorff, 221). I discuss this passage (and similar passages) in footnotes 71 and 72.

[101] Ibid.

will argue, however, that the more fundamental commonness of the principles of common sense consists in their common accessibility as first principles, not in their being commonly *believed* as first principles. This common accessibility as first principles is in turn based in the fact that principles of common sense are self-evident to epistemically competent adult humans. While principles of common sense may be, and according to Reid frequently are, immediately and justifiedly believed based on their self-evidence, Wolterstorff is incorrect in claiming that Reid understands them as "a certain subset of immediate and justifiedly held *beliefs*."

Reid does make some statements that, if read in isolation, seem to support Wolterstorff's interpretation that the principles of common sense are "beliefs which are shared by all." For example, Reid writes, "[S]ome [principles] are common to all men, being evident in themselves. . . . All men that have common understanding agree in such principles. . . ."[102] The common belief of first principles is explained by reference to their self-evidence: they "are common to all men, being evident in themselves." A paragraph later Reid significantly qualifies what he has just said by noting that all epistemically competent adults do not *actually* believe all the principles of common sense. Rather, all epistemically competent adults have *access* to the principles of common sense as first principles; they can believe them non-inferentially. This accessibility is based in the self-evidence of the principles of common sense: "Men need not to be taught them; for they are such as all men of common understanding know; or such, at least, as they give a ready assent to, as soon as they are proposed and understood."[103] A few paragraphs later

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[102] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 39.

[103] Ibid.

Reid notes that such principles "have such evidence, that every man of common understanding *readily* assents to them"—which is not the same as "*assents* to them."[104] In the *Active Powers*, Reid similarly writes, "Men may, to the end of life, be ignorant of self-evident truths."[105] Likewise, "there are truths, both speculative and moral, which a man left to himself would never discover; yet, when they are fairly laid before him, he owns and adopts them, not barely upon the authority of his teacher, but upon their own intrinsic evidence, and perhaps wonders that he could be so blind as not to see them before."[106]

An epistemically competent adult may not actually believe a principle of common sense; but if she were to think of this principle with understanding—if it were "proposed and understood"—she would immediately believe it, for it is self-evident. So while Reid does seem to think that most epistemically competent adults do believe most of the principles of common sense, the commonness of the principles ultimately lies in their self-evidence. Being self-evident, they are commonly accessible as first principles. This is in contrast, for instance, to perceptual first principles, which require particular perceptual experiences and hence are not commonly accessible as first principles.[107] Reid

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[104] Ibid., I.ii, 40. Emphasis added. In his discussion of the twelfth principle of contingent truths—"in the phaenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar circumstances"—Reid similarly writes, "This is what every man assents to as soon as he understands it, and no man asks a reason for it" (ibid., VI.v, 489-490).

[105] Reid, *AP*, V.ii, 278.

[106] Ibid., III.pt 3.viii, 188–189.

[107] This is not to say that the PCS would be self-evident to someone lacking certain types of experiences or a properly varied range of human experiences. As discussed below, the PCS are self-evident to epistemically competent adults, and this epistemic competence is partially developed through a range of experiences. For instance, an epistemically competent adult has acquired certain concepts, but many of these concepts are not acquire without having particular sorts of experiences. The key point is that self-evident first principles, unlike other first principles, are evident to an epistemically competent adult without that adult having to be in a particular situation—for instance, perceiving this particular tree in front of him.

thinks this common accessibility is the best, if not only, explanation for the widespread belief of many principles of common sense. For example, regarding the principle "That whatever begins to exist, must have a cause which produced it," Reid writes, "This universal belief of mankind is easily accounted for, if we allow that the necessity of a cause of every event is obvious to the rational powers of a man. But," Reid argues, "it is impossible to account for it otherwise."[108] While Reid makes some statements that suggest Wolterstorff's claim that all the principles of common sense are "*beliefs* which are shared by all," this is not Reid's carefully expressed opinion.

For a principle of common sense to be commonly accessible as a first principle, it is not sufficient that if an epistemically competent adult were to understand it, she would believe it based on its self-evidence. It must also be the case that an epistemically competent adult could readily apprehend the principle. Consider the following example. I perceive the coffee mug on my desk. The existence of the mug is a perceptual first principle for me. Upon intellectual analysis of my concept of the mug by common sense, it is self-evident to me that it is a concept of a black mug, and that the blackness of the mug is distinct from the shape of the mug. If any epistemically competent adult were to acquire my concept of the coffee mug on my desk and apprehend these judgments, they would be self-evident to her as well. After all, they are analytic of my concept of the mug. But while these would be self-evident to someone who had my concept of the mug, my concept of the mug is not readily accessible to all epistemically competent adults. It requires a particular perceptual experience, and one to which very few individuals have

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[108] Reid, *IP*, VI.vi, 497, 501. Earlier in the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid similarly writes, "There are many truths so obvious to the human faculties, that it may be expected that men should universally agree in them. And this is actually found to be the case with regard to many truths" (ibid., I.ii, 44-45).

access. So the accessibility of the principles of common sense as first principles requires two things. They must be self-evident to epistemically competent adults, meaning that if an epistemically competent adult were clearly to apprehend them, she would immediately assent to them. And it must also be the case that the principle is readily apprehensible by epistemically competent adults. This means that all the concepts contained in the principle must be ones that epistemically competent adults possess or have ready access to. This excludes self-evident truths involving the concepts of particular objects such as the mug on my desk.[109] It also explains why Reid's principles of common sense are general principles.[110] For instance, they are things such as, "That there is life and intelligence in our fellow-men with whom we converse."[111] This is readily apprehensible by, and according to Reid self-evident to, epistemically competent adults. In summary, for a principle of common sense to be readily accessible as a first principle, it must be readily apprehensible by and self-evident to epistemically competent adults.

Significantly, Reid often says not simply that the principles of common sense are self-evident, but that they are self-evident *to* (what I have been calling) epistemically competent adults.[112] The common accessibility of the principles of common sense is

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[109] It does not, however, necessarily exclude all self-evident truths involving concepts of particular objects. It may be that all epistemically competent adults have experienced certain objects, and hence have access to certain self-evident truths that contain concepts of these objects. For instance, it might plausibly be argued that all epistemically competent adults can apprehend and perceive the self-evidence of the following: "The sun is bright."

[110] For the seminal discussion of the distinction between generalist and particularist readings of Reid's principles, see Van Cleve, "Reid on First Principles."

[111] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 482.

[112] The relativity of self-evidence is significant. For Reid, a self-evident truth is one that any epistemically competent adult human would immediately believe upon understanding it. This allows for Reid to have a broader notion of self-evidence than the traditional one, according to which all self-evident truths are necessary or analytic—that is, such that any rational being would immediately believe upon understanding them.

relative to a certain subset of humans, and Reid has a fair amount to say about this subset. Four points are particularly relevant to our investigation.

First, the principles of common sense are self-evident only to those who have common sense.[113] This excludes children and those with mental defects: "We do not attribute common sense to brutes nor do we expect to find it in infants or idiots; but in persons of mature age who have no natural defect we always expect that degree of discernment and of understanding which we call common sense."[114]

Second and relatedly, the principles of common sense are self-evident to those with a "ripe" understanding or judgment.[115] According to Reid, "Our judgment of things is ripened, not by time only, but chiefly by being exercised about things of the same or of a similar kind."[116] Ripeness of understanding seems to involve both the acquisition of the relevant general concepts, and the training of the mind by judging in particular cases. For example, as regards self-evident mathematical truths, Reid writes,

> The evidence of mathematical axioms is not discerned till men come to a certain degree of maturity of understanding. A boy must have formed the general conception of *quantity*, and of *more* and *less* and *equal*, of *sum* and *difference*; and he must have been accustomed to judge of these relations in matters of

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[113] As already noted, common sense is that amount of *nous* (power of judging of self-evident truths) that is common, but there is also "uncommon discernment and penetration." To people who have such uncommon discernment, some truths may be self-evident that are not self-evident to common people. But since such principles are not self-evident to people with common sense, they are not principles of common sense. The principles of common sense are self-evident to common sense.

[114] Reid, "Curâ Primâ," 187.

[115] Reid is very aware of the social dimension of human development and its epistemic relevance, but I cannot here consider that topic. In one relevant passage from the *Active Powers*, Reid writes, "In their gradual progress, [the faculties of man] may be greatly assisted or retarded, improved or corrupted, by education, instruction, example, exercise, and by the society and conversation of men, which, like soil and culture in plants, may produce great changes to the better or to the worse" (*AP*, III.pt 3.viii, 187).

[116] Reid, *AP*, V.ii, 279.

> common life, before he can perceive the evidence of the mathematical axiom, that equal quantities, added to equal quantities, make equal sums.[117]

Without having formed general concepts such as *quantity*, it is impossible for someone to conceive of, much less judge of, self-evident mathematical truths. And before someone can perceive the self-evidence of abstract and general mathematical truths, it is first necessary to become accustomed to judging the relations of particular objects in common life. Reid gives a similar example regarding self-evident ethical truths: "[T]o a man trained in society, and accustomed to judge of his own actions and those of other men, to perceive a right and a wrong, an honourable and a base, in human conduct; . . . to such a man, I think, the principles of morals I have above mentioned will appear self-evident."[118] Given the breadth of areas that the principles of common sense cover, the ability to see the self-evidence of all of them will require a properly varied set of human experiences. There are two reasons for this. First, a properly varied set of experiences is necessary to acquire the concepts necessary to apprehend any given principle of common sense. Without the relevant concepts, one cannot apprehend a principle, and without apprehending it, one cannot see its self-evidence. Second, a properly varied set of human experiences supplies the practice judging in the various areas that is necessary to perceive the self-evidence of all the principles of common sense.[119]

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[117] Ibid., V.i, 276–277.

[118] Ibid., V.i, 277. A few pages later Reid similarly writes, "to a ripe understanding, . . . accustomed to judge of the morality of actions, most truths in morals will appear self-evident" (ibid., V.ii, 280).

[119] It is not entirely clear why according to Reid someone must be accustomed to judging of particular cases in common life before he can judge of general self-evident truths. One possible explanation is that through judging of particular cases, someone acquires the constitutional principles necessary for these general truths to be self-evident to her.

Thirdly, the PCS are self-evident only to those who clearly understand them: "Self-evident propositions are those which appear evident to every man of sound understanding who apprehends the meaning of them distinctly."[120] Since it is the clear apprehension of a self-evident proposition that triggers belief in itself, a proposition is self-evident only to those who can clearly understand it. Obviously, having common sense and a ripe understanding are important for clearly understanding many propositions and the concepts they contain. As we will see shortly, certain virtues (or at least the absence of certain vices) are also important for carefully attending to propositions and clearly understanding them. Someone who is hasty and impatient, for instance, might fail to clearly understand a proposition, and hence fail to perceive its self-evidence.

Finally, the principles of common sense are self-evident only to those who possess certain virtues, or at least are free from certain vices. Some of these virtues are needed for the mental focus necessary for the acquisition of certain general concepts:

> Judgment, even in things self-evident, requires a clear, distinct and steady conception of the things about which we judge. Our conceptions are at first obscure and wavering. The habit of attending to them is necessary to make them distinct and steady; and this habit requires an exertion of mind to which many of our animal principles are unfriendly. The love of truth calls for it; but its still voice is often drowned by the louder call of some passion, or we are hindered from listening to it by laziness and desultoriness. Thus men often remain through life ignorant of things which they needed but to open their eyes to see, and which they would have seen if their attention had been turned to them.[121]

Without a "love of truth" and the steadfastness needed to resist "animal principles" such as "passions" or "laziness and desultoriness," we will not acquire the distinct concepts we must deploy in understanding and judging of self-evident truths. Once we have these

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[120] Reid, *IP*, II.x, 141–142.

[121] Reid, *AP*, V.ii, 279.

concepts, we need other virtues—or at least the absence of certain vices—for the PCS to be self-evident to us. Vices that can hinder people's perception of the self-evidence of the PCS include personal interest, passion, prejudice, and an inordinate attention to custom:

> Men may, to the end of life, be ignorant of self-evident truths. They may, to the end of life, entertain gross absurdities. Experience shews that this happens often in matters that are indifferent. Much more may it happen in matters where interest, passion, prejudice and fashion, are so apt to pervert the judgment.[122]

Reid repeatedly emphasizes the epistemic significance of freedom from prejudice: "Self-evident propositions are those which appear evident to every man of sound understanding who . . . attends to them *without prejudice*."[123] Indeed, in the *Intellectual Powers*, the last chapter of the essay "Of Judgment" is entitled "Of Prejudices, the Causes of Error." Reid there gives a detailed account of Bacon's four classes of the "idols of the understanding," or biases that cause errors of judgment.[124] These idols of the understanding can lead to the denial of a principle of common sense. For instance, Bacon gives the name *idola specus* to one class of the idols of the understanding. Reid describes this class as "those prejudices which arise from the particular way in which a man has been trained, from his being addicted to some particular profession, or from something particular in the turn of his mind."[125] If, for example, one were raised in a community of pirates, one's prejudice against those outside one's community might lead one to deny numerous moral first principles. One might think there is nothing wrong with looting merchant ships and

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[122] Ibid., V.ii, 278.

[123] Reid, *IP*, II.x, 141–142. Emphasis added. In the *Active Powers*, Reid similarly writes, "to a ripe understanding, free from prejudice, . . . most truths in morals will appear self-evident" (*AP*, V.ii, 280).

[124] Reid writes, "I like best the general division given of them [i.e., "the disorders of the understanding"] by Lord Bacon in his fifth book *De augmentis scientiarum,* and more fully treated in his *Novum Organum*" (*IP*, VI.viii, 527).

[125] Reid, *IP*, VI.viii, 537.

killing those on board. This possibility does not contradict the self-evidence of certain moral truths, but rather highlights the fact that the PCS are self-evident only to someone who "attends to them without prejudice."

In summary, while some passages by themselves seem to indicate that Reid thinks everyone believes all the principles of common sense, this is not Reid's carefully expressed opinion, and it does not account for the commonness of the principles of common sense. I have argued that the principles of common sense are self-evident truths—truths that are self-evident to what I have called epistemically competent adults. Because they are self-evident to epistemically competent adults, the PCS are accessible as first principles to epistemically competent adults. Such common accessibility is the primary sense in which the PCS are common, though Reid also seems to think that most epistemically competent adults actually believe most of the PCS.

2.3. The Principles of Common Sense as Things Taken for Granted

As previously noted, Reid has two lines of thought regarding the PCS. According to the first, the PCS are self-evident truths. While Reid thinks many of the PCS are believed by many epistemically competent adults, their commonness consists primarily in their common accessibility as first principles. Reid's other line of thought is that the PCS are things we all take for granted in living our everyday lives:

> If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to *take for granted in the common concerns of life*, without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd.[126]

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[126] Reid, *Inquiry*, II.vi, 33. Emphasis added.

As previously noted, Reid uses "take for granted" in two main senses: in the sense of *believe non-inferentially, without proof*, and in the sense of *presuppose or assume*. As a result, contra Wolterstorff, the above passage by itself does not provide strong evidence that Reid understands the PCS as things presupposed or assumed. I will therefore turn elsewhere to establish that Reid thinks of the PCS in this manner. In light of this further evidence, I conclude that the above instance of "take for granted" should be understood in the sense of *presuppose*. In what follows, I will always use "take for granted" in the sense of *presuppose or assume*. Reid seems to understand taking for granted as something like the following: to take *x* for granted in action or belief *y* means that if we were to disbelieve *x*, action or belief *y* would no longer be rational for us.[127] For instance, we take for granted the reliability of our eyesight in every visual perceptual belief. If we were to doubt the reliability of our eyesight, it would no longer be rational for us to form visual perceptual beliefs. In taking *x* for granted, one need not have any belief concerning *x*. A child who has never considered the reliability of her eyesight nonetheless takes it for granted in forming visual perceptual beliefs.

Perhaps Reid's clearest and most developed discussion of the principles of common sense as things taken for granted occurs in his discussion of the seventh of his "first principles of contingent truths": "That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious." Reid writes, "If any truth can be said to be prior to all others in the order of nature, this seems to have the best claim; because in every instance of assent, whether upon intuitive, demonstrative, or probable evidence, the truth

[127] I propose this only as an illuminating suggestion, not as a philosophical analysis of taking for granted. According to Wolterstorff, he "cannot point to an articulate account of the propositional attitude of *taking for granted*; to the best of my knowledge, no one has ever developed such an account. It remains an item on the philosophical agenda" (Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense," 386). Like Wolterstorff, I will leave this item on the philosophical agenda.

of our faculties is taken for granted, and is, as it were, one of the premises on which our assent is grounded."[128] Reid does not claim that this truth is "prior to all others in the order of *what is known*," but "in the order of nature." While it is not immediately clear what Reid means by this phrase, it is clear that Reid is *not* claiming that this is the first truth we know, or that we reason from this truth to all other truths. When he elaborates on this point, Reid says not that this truth *is* "one of the premises on which our assent [to any truth] is grounded." He rather says that this truth "is, *as it were*, one of the premises on which our assent is grounded." The veridical nature of our faculties is not a premise on which we ground all our beliefs, but rather something that in all our beliefs we "take for granted." Reid also describes this phenomenon of "taking for granted" as *trusting*: "If any man should demand a proof of this, it is impossible to satisfy him. For suppose it should be mathematically demonstrated, this would signify nothing in this case; because, to judge of a demonstration, a man must trust his faculties, and take for granted the very thing in question."[129] In forming beliefs, we trust our faculties, or take for granted their reliability.

In his discussion of the seventh first principle of contingent truths, Reid proceeds to note that this phenomenon of being "taken for granted" is common to many other principles of common sense:

> We may here take notice of a property of the principle under consideration, that seems to be common to it with many other first principles [of common sense]. . . . When a man in the common course of life gives credit to the testimony of his senses, his memory, or his reason, he does not put the question to himself, whether these faculties may deceive him; yet the trust he reposes in them

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[128] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 481. For similar passages, see *IP*, VII.iv, 570, 571.

[129] Ibid., VI.v, 480.

> supposes an inward conviction, that, in that instance at least, they do not deceive him.[130]

According to Reid, this principle is rarely "attended to, or made an object of thought. No man ever thinks of this principle, unless when he considers the grounds of skepticism."[131] This is not a principle that most people *believe*.[132] But it is one they take for granted in their everyday lives. Reid struggles to express what he is getting at: "When a man in the common course of life gives credit to the testimony of his senses, his memory, or his reason, . . . the trust he reposes in them supposes an inward conviction, that, in that instance at least, they do not deceive him." The phrase "an inward conviction" is clumsy. It does not mean a conviction inside the mind, as opposed to outside the mind, for all conviction are inward in that sense. By "inward conviction," Reid is trying to get at something that isn't even a conviction; he is trying, albeit clumsily, to explain that whenever someone "gives credit to the testimony of his" faculties, he is taking for granted that they are veridical.

Reid's discussion of the seventh principle of contingent truths shows that Reid understands the PCS as things taken for granted. But the difficulty Reid has expressing this also suggests that he is not entirely clear about it. This lack of clarity comes through in several other passages, passages that are both confusing and confused. I will here consider only one such passage.[133] Reid's twelfth first principle of contingent truths is, "That, in the phaenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been

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[130] Ibid., VI.v, 481–482.

[131] Ibid., VI.v, 482.

[132] As Reid notes elsewhere, "Belief must have an object. For he that believes, must believe something; and that which he believes is called the object of his belief" (*IP*, II.xx, 227–228).

[133] For some additional passage where Reid fails to properly distinguish beliefs, presuppositions, and principles of our constitution, see *IP*, VI.v, 482; *Inquiry*, VII, 215; and *AP*, IV.vi, 231.

in similar circumstances." According to Reid, "We must have this *conviction* as soon as we are capable of learning any thing from experience; for all experience is grounded upon a *belief* that the future will be like the past. Take away this principle, and the experience of an hundred years makes us no wiser with regard to what is to come."[134] According to this passage, everything we learn from experience is grounded upon our *belief* that the future will be like the past. The most natural way to understand this is that when someone has an experience—to borrow one of Reid's favorite examples, when a child burns his finger on a candle—he learns that candles burn via an inference based on the belief that "what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar circumstances." This interpretation also makes sense of Reid's statement that "all our expectation of what is to happen in the course of nature is derived from the belief of this principle."[135] Reid proceeds to note that while adults can "confirm" this principle by reasoning, "the principle is necessary for us before we are able to discover it by reasoning, and therefore is made *a part of our constitution*, and produces its effects before the use of reason."[136] This is odd. How can a *belief* be "a part of our constitution"? And how can a belief used in reasoning about the future "[produce] its effects *before the use of reason*"? Reid is here confused. His confusion arises from his failure to distinguish three things:

1) believing "that the future will be like the past";
2) taking it for granted "that the future will be like the past"; and

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[134] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 489. All emphases added.

[135] Ibid., VI.v, 490.

[136] Ibid., VI.v, 489. Emphasis added.

3) the constitutional principle that determines us to think and act in ways that take for granted "that the future will be like the past."

This third item is what Reid elsewhere calls the inductive principle. It is by this principle of our constitution that

> when we have found two things to have been constantly conjoined in the course of nature, the appearance of one of them is immediately followed by the conception and belief of the other. The former becomes a natural sign of the later. . . . [T]he appearance of one, without any reasoning or reflection, carries along with it the belief of the other.[137]

Elsewhere Reid explains that it is by this "instinctive induction" that "a child who has once burnt his finger, by putting it in the flame of one candle, expects the same event if he puts it in the flame of another candle, or in any flame, and is thereby led to think that the quality of burning belongs to all flame."[138]

When Reid writes that "all our expectation of what is to happen in the course of nature is derived from the belief of this principle," he is confusing *believing "that the future will be like the past"* with *the inductive principle of our constitution*. It is the inductive principle, and not a belief, that makes us "capable of learning . . . from experience." When Reid writes that the belief "that the future will be like the past" is "a part of our constitution, and produces its effects before the use of reason," he is again confusing a belief with the inductive principle: He should say that *the inductive principle* is "a part of our constitution, and produces its effects before the use of reason." What Reid is trying to say about the twelfth principle of contingent truths—or at least, what he should be saying, in line with his discussion of the seventh principle—is, "We must *take*

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[137] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 195–196, 199.

[138] Reid, *IP*, V.iv, 374. Reid similar writes that humans "know that these have happened regularly; and, upon this ground, they are led, by the constitution of human nature, to expect that they will happen in time to come, in like circumstances" (ibid., VII.iii, 561; see also V.iv, 382).

this for granted as soon as we are capable of learning any thing from experience." We take it for granted because we are constituted to do so: the inductive principle determines us to live and think in ways that take for granted "that the future will be like the past."

The commonness of the PCS as things taken for granted in everyday life is actual and universal among competent adults: in their everyday lives, all competent adults live and think in ways that take for granted the PCS. This is because the principles of common sense are things "we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life."[139] This necessity is explained by the fact that the principles of our constitution determine us to act and think in ways that take the PCS for granted. For instance, we are so constituted that we all live as if our epistemic faculties are generally reliable, and we all live as if the future will be similar to the past. We do these things even if we never form a belief regarding these matters.

2.4. Reconciling Reid's Understandings of the Principles of Common Sense

I have identified two lines of thought in Reid's writings regarding the principles of common sense. According to the first, the PCS are principles that are self-evident to epistemically competent adults. According to the second, the PCS are things epistemically competent adults take for granted in their everyday lives. I will argue that these two lines of thought, while different, are compatible, and that Reid's PCS are best understood as those principles that satisfy both lines of thought. That is, the PCS are those principles that are both self-evident to epistemically competent adults and taken for granted by epistemically competent adults in their everyday lives. First, however, I will respond to several objections raised by Wolterstorff.

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[139] Reid, *Inquiry*, II.vi, 33.

2.4.1. Responses to Wolterstorff's objections. The two lines of thought about the PCS that I have identified are very similar to those identified by Wolterstorff. Wolterstorff, however, argues that these lines of thought are not compatible, and that we should take the *taken for granted* line of thought as determinative. In defense of my view, it is important and illuminating to respond to Wolterstorff's arguments.

According to Wolterstorff, Reid's first line of thought regarding the PCS is that they are "a certain subset of immediate and justifiedly held beliefs; they are those of such beliefs which are shared by all. . . . [P]rinciples of Common Sense are a subset of first principles, namely, those held in common."[140] The second line of thought is that the PCS are things we all take for granted.[141] Wolterstorff gives three arguments that these two lines of thought "conflict" and "don't mesh."[142] By this, Wolterstorff means that everything that satisfies the first line of thought does not also satisfy the second, and vice versa: "these two ways of thinking yield different sets of principles."[143] I will show that all three of Wolterstorff's arguments for the incompatibility of Reid's two lines of thought fail. A key part of my response is that Wolterstorff has misunderstood Reid's first line of thought: Contra Wolterstorff, the principles of common sense are not things believed by everyone, but rather things self-evident to all epistemically competent adults (and not necessarily believed by them).

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[140] Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 223. See my footnote 100.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid., 220, 225; Wolterstorff gives these three arguments nearly verbatim in "Reid on Common Sense," 383.

[143] Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense," 383.

Wolterstorff's first argument is that "most people surely don't actually *believe* those propositions that all those of us who are normal adults must take for granted in our living of life in the everyday. Most people haven't even so much as entertained them, let alone believed them." Wolterstorff gives two reasons to think this. First, Wolterstorff points out that *believing* and *taking for granted* are "different propositional attitude[s]—if one wants to call [them] that," and one can take something for granted without believing it.[144] Second, "what we all take for granted concerning the reliability of memory, say, is full of subtle qualifications built up by tacit rather than explicit learning, and consequently extremely difficult to extract and formulate with full precision." The idea seems to be that if we all *do* have beliefs roughly regarding what we take for granted, these beliefs are not the *same* as what we take for granted, for what we take for granted is "full of subtle qualifications" that surely are not contained in these beliefs.[145]

In response, I have argued that Reid's first line of thought regarding the PCS is not that they are things all epistemically competent adults *believe*. They are rather things all epistemically competent adults find self-evident, and therefore things that adults have access to as first principles. The PCS are not necessarily things believed as first principle, but rather things potentially believed as first principles. So while Wolterstorff is correct that most people don't actually *believe* what we all take for granted in our everyday lives, this is not an objection to my interpretation. His second point regarding the "subtle

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[144] Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 225.

[145] Elsewhere Wolterstorff emphasizes this point: "What Reid nowhere mentions is what seems to me the most important source of mistakes in the identification of principles of common sense, understood as things taken for granted: the subtlety of our practices makes it extraordinarily difficult to identify and formulate with full accuracy what we all take for granted in our employment of those practices. We all learn not to take at their word people who look and act in certain ways. Is any of us able to describe exactly what that look and behavior is?" (Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense," 382).

qualifications" of what we take for granted does, however, apply to my interpretation. It might be objected that the things we take for granted cannot also be the things we find self-evident, for what we find self-evident lacks many of the subtle qualifications of what we take for granted. However, I am not arguing that according to Reid *everything* we take for granted, say, regarding the reliability of memory, is also something that if expressed in a proposition most competent adults would find self-evident. The idea is rather that there is a "core" taken-for-granted that is also self-evident, even if all the subtle qualifications of what we take for granted are not self-evident. What we take for granted can be expressed in different propositions, and not just those maximally specific propositions that capture all the subtle qualifications of what we take for granted. Thus, as regards memory, a core thing taken for granted might be that almost everything I distinctly remember actually happened. An exhaustive description of what we take for granted regarding memory may have many more subtle qualifications. Nonetheless, we do take this for granted, and it is plausible that epistemically competent adults find it self-evident (in Reid's sense of the term).

Wolterstorff's second argument is that "if anybody has managed to extract one of these propositions taken for granted by all of us, and then to believe it, surely he will not have believed it immediately. The belief will have emerged from a lengthy process of reflection."[146] My response to Wolterstorff's first argument also applies here. While the maximally specific proposition regarding what we all take for granted regarding memory may not be something epistemically competent adults find self-evident, this does not preclude core taken-for-granted propositions from being self-evident.

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[146] Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 225.

Wolterstorff's third argument that Reid's two lines of thought are incompatible is that "many of the things we take for granted do not function as beliefs on the basis of which we believe other things; they are not 'principles, upon which I build all my reasoning.'"[147] Wolterstorff's argument seems to be that 1) according to the things-believed line of thought, all the PCS function as bases from which we believe other things; 2) many things we take for granted are not believed and thus cannot function in this way; and 3) thus many of the things we take for granted lack an essential property according to the things-believed line of thought. This shows that these two lines of thought are incompatible.

In response, I have argued that according to Reid's first line of thought the PCS are not things believed by all epistemically competent adults, but things self-evident to them. Thus, I do not claim that according to Reid's first line of thought all the PCS function as bases for other beliefs.

As regards the passage from Reid quoted by Wolterstorff, it is not clear that it claims all principles of common sense are things "upon which I build all my reasoning" and hence things believed. The sentence in full reads, "How or when I got such first principles, upon which I build all my reasoning, I know not; for I had them before I can remember: but I am sure they are parts of my constitution, and that I cannot throw them off."[148] In the first place, it is not entirely clear whether Reid is here discussing first principles in general, or first principles of common sense. Only if Reid is discussing first principles of common sense does this passage suggest that all principles of common

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[147] Ibid. The quoted passage comes from *Inquiry*, V.vii, 72.

[148] Reid, *Inquiry*, V.vii, 72.

sense are things "upon which I build all my reasoning," and hence things believed. If Reid is here discussing first principles in general, then this passage is not problematic: it is correct that all of the first principles for any given individual are things believed by her. While the principles of common sense may be accessible to this individual as first principles, they are first principles for her only if she believes them. Secondly, this passage is one of those places where Reid confusedly shifts between discussing principles as *things believed* and as *parts of our constitution*: "such first principles, upon which I build all my reasoning, . . . are parts of my constitution." Hence, we should not place much weight on this passage. Finally, even if Reid is here discussing the PCS, it is not clear whether the phrase "upon which I build all my reasoning" is describing all the PCS—"How or when I got such first principles (I build all my reasoning upon them), I know not"—or whether it is functioning to limit the scope of the PCS Reid is discussing—"How or when I got those ones of the first principles upon which I build all my reasoning, I know not." For this passage to support Wolterstorff's claim that all the PCS are things "upon which I build all my reasoning," it must be read in the first sense; but it need not be.

Each of Wolterstorff's three arguments for the incompatibility of Reid's two lines of thought fails to establish this conclusion. There is a further, deeper problem regarding how Wolterstorff sets up the issue of the compatibility of Reid's two lines of thought. Wolterstorff assumes that according to Reid's first line of thought, something is a PCS if and only if it is believed by everyone (I say, self-evident to everyone). Being believed by everyone is a necessary and a sufficient condition for being a principle of common sense. As regards the second line of thought, Wolterstorff assumes that something is a PCS if

and only if it is taken for granted by everyone in their everyday lives. Being taken for granted by everyone is a necessary and a sufficient condition for being a principle of common sense. Granting these two assumptions, it follows that something is believed by (I say, self-evident to) everyone if and only if it is taken for granted by everyone in their everyday lives. That is, Reid's two lines of thought are supposed to be coextensive. Wolterstorff therefore thinks the issue is whether they actually are coextensive. Is everything believed by (I say, self-evident to) everyone is also taken for granted by everyone? Wolterstorff allows that this is plausible. But he denies that everything taken for granted by everyone is also something believed by (I say, self-evident to) everyone:

> Presumably it is the case that everything that all those of us who are normal adults believe immediately and justifiedly is also taken for granted by all of us in the living of our lives in the everyday; elementary propositions of logic and mathematics would be examples. But the converse is definitely not true.[149]

Because Wolterstorff thinks Reid's two lines of thought are supposed to be coextensive, he considers it problematic that "these two ways of thinking yield different sets of principles."[150]

Why does Wolterstorff think Reid's two lines of thought are supposed to be coextensive? He seems to arrive at this position by reading descriptions of the principles of common sense as identity claims. For instance, when Wolterstorff writes that according to Reid's first line of thought the "Principles of Common Sense are shared first principles," he does not read the being verb as predicating something of the principles of common sense. He rather reads it as an identity claim: the principles of common sense and shared first principles are identical. An example can help illuminate the distinction. If

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[149] Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 225.

[150] Wolterstorff, "Reid on Common Sense," 383.

the above claim were "dogs are animals with four legs," Wolterstorff is not reading it as "dogs have four legs," but as "dogs and animals with four legs are the same things," or "something is a dog if and only if it is an animal with four legs." This explains why Wolterstorff describes the principles of common sense as "a certain subset of immediately and justifiedly held beliefs," namely "those of such beliefs which are shared by all."[151]

However, neither Wolterstorff nor I have argued that Reid's two lines of thought are supposed to be coextensive. Reid's view is that being taken for granted by everyone in everyday life is a *necessary* condition for being a PCS; he does not further claim it is sufficient. That is, all the principles of common sense are things taken for granted by everyone, but it is not necessarily the case that everything taken for granted by everyone is a PCS. As regards Reid's other line of thought, I have argued only that being self-evident to epistemically competent adults is a necessary condition for being a PCS. As I show in the following section, being self-evident is not a sufficient condition. That is, all principles of common sense are things self-evident to epistemically competent adults, but not everything self-evident to epistemically competent adults is a PCS. In summary, showing Reid's two lines of thought are not coextensive does not show they are inconsistent or incompatible.[152] My proposal is that Reid's principles of common sense are the *intersection* of his two lines of thoughts. They are those things that are both taken for granted by and self-evident to epistemically competent adults.

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[151] Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 223.

[152] To prove that they are incompatible, it would be necessary to focus on those things self-evident to everyone that are *also* principles of common sense, and focus on those things taken for granted by everyone that are *also* principles of common sense. That is, it would be necessary to show that some of those things that are a) both taken for granted *and* principles of common sense are not things that b) are self-evident *and* principles of common sense (or vice versa).

2.4.2. The principles of common sense as things that are both self-evident and taken for granted. Reid sometimes explicitly brings his two lines of thought together, suggesting they are not merely two distinct, unrelated views of the principles of common sense. In a previously considered key passage from the *Inquiry*, Reid identifies the principles of common sense with neither the self-evident/commonly-accessible-as-first-principles line of thought, nor with the taken-for-granted line of thought. He rather identifies them with the *intersection* of these two: "If there are certain principles, as I think there are, [1] which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, *and* [2] which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense."[153] That is, the PCS are those principles that are *both* 1) self-evident to epistemically competent adults and 2) taken for granted by them in their everyday lives.[154] A passage in the *Intellectual Powers* also suggests this dual understanding of the PCS. According to Reid, principles of common sense "have such evidence, that every man of common understanding readily assents to them"—that is, they are self-evident—"and finds it absolutely necessary to conduct his actions and opinions by them, in the ordinary affairs of life"—that is, they are taken for granted in everyday life.[155]

This dual understanding of the principles of common sense means there might be things we all take for granted in our everyday lives that do not qualify as principles of

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[153] Reid, *Inquiry*, II.vi, 33. Emphasis added.

[154] I do not deny that there might be some additional, as yet unmentioned characteristic of the PCS; they may be some subset of those principles that are self-evident to and taken for granted by epistemically competent adults. This would not make my point inaccurate, just incomplete. I consider a possible third qualification below.

[155] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 40–41. Reid is here focusing on a subset of the principles of common sense, namely, those ones that are also first principles of natural philosophy.

common sense since epistemically competent adults do not find them self-evident.[156] Furthermore, this dual understanding means that not everything self-evident to epistemically competent adults is a PCS; it must also be taken for granted by them in their everyday lives. For example, that my concept of the whiteness of this paper is different than my concept of the shape of this paper is self-evident and a judgment of common sense. But this is not a principle of common sense, for it is not taken for granted by everyone in their everyday lives.[157] As I will show, this condition excludes some self-evident propositions, such as "trifling propositions," from counting as principles of common sense. Given Reid's understanding of the PCS, such trifling propositions should be excluded. The fact that my dual interpretation of the principles of common sense excludes many, if not all, of these propositions further supports my interpretation.

Clearly, the PCS are supposed to be substantive and epistemically significant. They are the "the foundation of all reasoning, and of all science."[158] As Reid writes elsewhere, "[T]he first principles of all sciences are the dictates of common sense, and lie open to all men."[159] Furthermore, the PCS are things all epistemically competent adults

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[156] I have not been able to come up with a good example of such a proposition, and I am not committed to the claim that they exist. My key point is the following one.

[157] There is an additional reason this does not qualify as a principle of common sense. Principles of common sense have to be accessible to epistemically competent adults as first principles. This means such individuals must be able to conceptually entertain the principle with only the concepts acquired through a properly varied set of human experiences, and then to see its self-evidence. If conceptually entertaining a self-evident truth requires some particular experience, such as perceiving the mug on my desk, in order to acquire some of its conceptual components, then this truth is not commonly accessible to epistemically competent adults. As a result, it is not a principle of common sense.

[158] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 39.

[159] Ibid., VI.iv, 466.

can *know*, and when used in the sciences, they are called *axioms*.[160] This lofty epistemic status is not, however, enjoyed by all self-evident truths:

> [T]here are innumerable self-evident propositions, which have neither dignity nor utility, and therefore deserve not the name of axioms, as that name is commonly understood to imply not only self-evidence, but some degree of dignity or utility.

Plausibly, the dignity of axioms consists in their centrality to a body of knowledge, or their depth of ingression. The utility of axioms plausibly refers to their usefulness in the common concerns of life. Reid proceeds:

> That a man is a man, and that a man is not a horse, are self-evident propositions; but they are, as Mr Locke very justly calls them, trifling propositions. Tillotson very wittily says of such propositions, that they are so surfeited with truth, that they are good for nothing; and as they deserve not the name of axioms, so neither do they deserve the name of knowledge. . . .
>
> I grant that [such trifling self-evident propositions] are not derived from axioms, because they are themselves self-evident. But it is an abuse of words to call them knowledge, as it is, to call them axioms; for no man can be said to be the wiser or more knowing for having millions of them in store.[161]

According to Reid, some self-evident propositions are "trifling," and do not amount to the status of either axioms or knowledge. The PCS, however, have the epistemic significance of both axioms and knowledge. By limiting the PCS to those self-evident propositions that are taken for granted by all epistemically competent adults in living their everyday lives, Reid plausibly excludes many, if not all, such trifling propositions. While it may be self-evident "that a man is a man," this is not something we all take for granted in living our everyday lives.[162] The fact that my dual interpretation of the

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[160] Ibid., I.ii, 39.

[161] Ibid., VI.vii, 520–521.

[162] This does, of course, depend upon exactly what *taking for granted* is. I cannot here provide a philosophical analysis of *taking for granted*, or *presupposing*, though I suggest the beginning of an account above in the material surrounding footnote 127. It is clear, however, that not everything logically entailed by doing *x* is taken for granted in doing *x*. In not providing a more detailed account of *taking for granted* than that provided in my above discussion of Reid, I consider myself in good company. Wolterstorff writes,

principles of common sense properly excludes such trifling propositions counts in its favor. If it were to turn out that the intersection of what is self-evident to and taken for granted by all epistemically competent adults includes some such trifling propositions, then Reid would need to add an additional qualification to the PCS. This would not, however, mean that this dual understanding of the PCS is inaccurate, but only that it is incomplete: something is a principle of common sense if and only if it is 1) self-evident to all epistemically competent adults and 2) taken for granted by them in living their everyday lives, and 3) not a trifling proposition.

"Whatever [taking for granted] may be—and here I won't try to say—it's not that [i.e., believing]" (*Reid*, 246).

CHAPTER FOUR

Externalism about First Principles

The previous two chapters examined Reid's understanding of first principles and the principles of common sense, but did not specifically consider their epistemic justification. This chapter develops an account of the epistemic justification of first principles within Reid's epistemology. More specifically, it accounts for the initial justification of first principles, or their justification *qua* first principles. Understanding the initial justification of first principles clarifies the roles theism can and cannot play in relation to their justification. Against the backdrop of this and the previous two chapters, the remaining chapters consider how theism can boost the justification of first principles (chapters 5 and 6), upgrade knowledge of first principles to a higher level or grade of knowledge (chapter 7), and preserve the justification of first principles by warding off certain defeaters and skeptical worries to which non-theists are liable (chapter 8).

Reid's epistemology is standardly interpreted as a form of externalist foundationalism. This account is largely correct, although in chapter 6 I will qualify it by arguing that Reid's epistemology is not *simply* foundationalist, but contains coherentist strands. Nonetheless, it is true that for Reid externalism gets one epistemically off the ground by accounting for the justification of first principles, and most justification is a function of beliefs ultimately resting on a foundation of non-inferentially justified first principles. When first principles are formed in the proper way, such as through reliable belief-forming mechanisms, they are justified just by virtue of being so formed.

Satisfying certain externalist requirements generates their justification. The justification of these foundational beliefs is transmitted to other beliefs that are properly based on them.

While other commentators have noted that Reid's epistemology is a form of externalist foundationalism—indeed, we might call this the standard interpretation—I show that Reid has a surprisingly well-developed and nuanced proper functionalism. There is need for a detailed textual argument that Reid's epistemology is proper-functionalist and a detailed textual account of the contours of Reid's proper functionalism. While philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga and Michael Bergmann have developed Reid-inspired epistemologies that are proper functionalist, neither claims to be presenting or interpreting Reid's epistemology.[1] Other philosophers, such as John Greco, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Philip de Bary, have claimed Reid has a proper functionalist epistemology, but their discussions of this are brief and based on a small and selective number of texts.[2] I show Reid has a very developed proper-functionalist epistemology with four key components. For a belief to be justified, it is necessary for it to be produced by faculties that are truth-directed, functioning properly, functioning in an appropriate environment, and properly responsive to defeaters.[3] My proper functionalist interpretation of Reid is more comprehensive, detailed, and textually supported than any

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[1] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*; Michael Bergmann, "Reidian Externalism," in *New Waves in Epistemology*, ed. Vincent F. Hendricks and Duncan Pritchard (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 52–74.

[2] John Greco, "Reid's Reply to the Skeptic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 150; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Hume and Reid," *The Monist* 70, no. 4 (1987): 409–410; de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 83, 159.

[3] My account of Reid's proper functionalism bears obvious similarities to Plantinga's proper functionalist epistemology (see especially *Warrant and Proper Function*). Plantinga's work has contributed to the clarity of my proper-functionalist interpretation of Reid, and I have adopted some of his terminology.

in the literature. It also brings to light several overlooked elements of his epistemology. These include the ways that many non-intellectual faculties are, at least in a derivative sense, truth-directed; Reid's account of the truth-directedness of acquired perceptions; the significant role that virtues play in Reid's epistemology; and Reid's highly developed understanding of defeaters.

1. Reid's Foundationalism

For Reid, our faculties deliver non-inferentially justified beliefs, or first principles, upon which the rest of our knowledge rests. John Greco has usefully described Reid's foundationalism as "moderate and broad."[4] Classical foundationalism, such as Descartes's, requires a certain and indubitable foundation for knowledge. By contrast, Reid's foundationalism is *moderate* in that infallibility is not necessary for a faculty to deliver foundational knowledge:

> That man, and probably every created being, is fallible; and that a fallible being cannot have that perfect comprehension and assurance of truth which an infallible being has, I think ought to be granted. It becomes a fallible being to be modest, open to new light, and sensible, that by some false bias, or by rash judging, he may be misled. . . . Human judgments ought always to be formed with an humble sense of our fallibility in judging.[5]

Reid claims that despite this fallibility we can and do know things.

The moderation of Reid's foundationalism allows for it be *broad*. Foundational sources of knowledge include perception, memory, consciousness, conscience, testimony, and reason. This diversity of foundations can in turn support a large superstructure. In this respect Reid's foundationalism lies between the Peripatetics and the Cartesians and "moderns":

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[4] Greco, "Reid's Reply to the Skeptic," 148.

[5] Reid, *IP*, VII.iv, 563, 564.

> The Peripatetic not only adopted as first principles those which mankind have always rested upon in their most important transactions, but, along with them, many vulgar prejudices; so that this system was founded upon a wide bottom, but in many parts unsound. The modern system has narrowed the foundation so much, that every superstructure raised upon it appears top-heavy.
>
> From the single principle of the existence of our own thoughts, very little, if any thing, can be deduced by just reasoning, especially if we suppose that all our other faculties may be fallacious.[6]

Like the Peripatetics and unlike the moderns, Reid bases his epistemology on a "wide bottom." But he seeks to be more discriminating than the Peripatetics. Like the moderns, he seeks to eschew numerous "vulgar prejudices" that the Peripatetics accept as first principles. But Reid sees several problems with the moderns' attempt to base all knowledge upon a narrow foundation of indubitable first principles. As the above passage indicates, if we constrict the foundation of knowledge to a handful of first principles, "very little, if any thing, can be deduced" from them. The project of classical foundationalism is doomed to failure.

Reid also claims the moderns' ranking of faculties and their exaltation of reason are unjustified. As Reid writes in an often-quoted passage,

> Why, Sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception; they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?[7]

By parity, we should count all our epistemic faculties as equally authoritative. They all came from the same source, and hence one should not be privileged over the others. In response to those who claim that nonetheless reason is more reliable than our other faculties, and hence that we are justified in attempting to base all our beliefs on the deliverances of reason, Reid insists that all our faculties are equally reliable:

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[6] Ibid., VI.vii, 518.

[7] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 169.

> [T]here is no more reason to account our senses fallacious, than our reason, our memory, or any other faculty of judging which Nature hath given us. They are all limited and imperfect; but wisely suited to the present condition of man. We are liable to error and wrong judgment in the use of them all; but as little in the informations of sense as in the deductions of reasoning.[8]

In short, none of our faculties are perfect and indubitable, but all our numerous faculties are basic sources of knowledge and stand on equal epistemic ground.[9]

In Reid's broad foundationalism, the different sources of knowledge are irreducible to one another and thus in a sense autonomous: "The evidence of sense, the evidence of memory, and the evidence of the necessary relations of things, are all distinct and original kinds of evidence, equally grounded on our constitution: none of them depends upon, or can be resolved into another."[10] This irreducibility preserves the breadth of Reid's foundationalism. If the evidence of one source of knowledge could be reduced to that of another, then the first source would not be foundational.

2. Reid's Proper Functionalism

Reid has a surprisingly well-developed proper functionalist epistemology with four key components. For a belief to enjoy epistemic justification, it is necessary for it to be the product of faculties that are 1) truth-directed, 2) functioning properly, 3) functioning in an appropriate environment, and 4) properly responsive to defeaters. In the

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[8] Reid, *IP*, II.xxii, 251–252.

[9] It is questionable whether Reid should have claimed this, and some passages contradict it. For example, beliefs regarding our present sensations (and by extension, consciousness) seem particularly reliable—indeed, infallible: "It is impossible that there can be any fallacy in sensation: For we are conscious of all our sensations, and they can neither be any other in their nature, nor greater or less in their degree than we feel them. It is impossible that a man should be in pain, when he does not feel pain; and when he feels pain, it is impossible that his pain should not be real, and in its degree what it is felt to be; and the same thing may be said of every sensation whatsoever. An agreeable or an uneasy sensation may be forgot when it is past, but when it is present, it can be nothing but what we feel" (*IP*, II.xxii, 243).

[10] Reid, *Inquiry*, II.v, 32.

process of showing that Reid has a sophisticated proper functionalism, I will reveal several overlooked elements of his epistemology. These include the ways that many non-intellectual faculties are, at least in a derivative sense, truth-directed; Reid's account of the truth-directedness of acquired perceptions; the significant role that virtues play in Reid's epistemology; and Reid's highly developed understanding of defeaters.

2.1. The Truth-Directed Nature of our Intellectual Powers

According to Reid, a natural function of our intellectual powers is the production of true beliefs:

> Our intellectual powers are wisely fitted by the Author of our nature *for the discovery of truth*, as far as suits our present estate. *Error is not their natural issue*, any more than disease is of the natural structure of the body. . . . The understanding, in its natural and best state, pays its homage to truth only.[11]

Reid is not here claiming that our intellectual powers lead us to believe *only* true beliefs. As a moderate foundationalist, he thinks that our faculties sometimes deliver false beliefs. Reid's point is that while our faculties are fallible, they are not fallacious. The "*natural* issue" of our intellectual powers is truth.

The above passage focuses on the truth-directed nature of our *intellectual* powers. This focus is proper, for only intellectual powers directly produce beliefs. However, the veracity of many of our intellectual powers depends in various ways upon the proper functioning of our non-intellectual faculties and operations, such as our eyes. To the

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[11] Reid, *IP*, VI.viii, 527–528. Emphases added. For a similar passage, see *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 173. For our faculties to be truth-directed, they need to have a teleology; they need to be "fitted" by God for discovering truth. Reid may think that this teleology requires a Designer. If this is so, it would reveal yet another way that theism is important for Reid's epistemology. Plantinga has argued a similar point regarding his own proper-functionalist epistemology: "[I]f, as it looks, it is in fact impossible to give an account of proper function in naturalistic terms, then metaphysical naturalism and naturalistic epistemology are at best uneasy bedfellows. The right way to be a naturalist in epistemology is to be a supernaturalist in metaphysics" (Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 211).

extent that these non-intellectual faculties and operations function in the production of true beliefs, it makes sense to describe them as also being truth-directed, at least in a derivative sense. One of their functions is the production of true beliefs.

For example, consider Reid's account of human perception. In perception there are two key mental events: a sensation, and a belief in a presently existing object. The sensation suggests, or occasions, the belief. There is not, and according to Reid cannot be, an inference from the sensation to that which it is signifies. This is because the sensation does not resemble that which it signifies (is a sign of); the connection is, for all we can tell, entirely arbitrary.[12] For our intellectual powers to be truth-directed in this case means that the mental events of sensation and belief correspond: when we have the sensation that corresponds to, say, hardness, the "natural issue" of our cognitive powers is a belief in the present existence of a hard object. But when we perceive something, the correctness of our perceptual belief depends upon the truth-directedness of a number of additional, prior operations, some of which are not mental. As Reid says, "our perception of objects is the result of a train of operations; some of which affect the body only, others affect the mind." The connection between each of the steps in this chain of operations is, as far as we can tell, just as arbitrary as the connection between a sensation and that which it signifies.

Because Reid is a dualist, he claims that not only mental but bodily operations are internal to a perceiver. The chain of operations leading to a human perception ceases to be external and becomes internal once it enters the perceiver's body. As regards human perceivers, the first internal operation leading to a perceptual belief is "some action or

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[12] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 227. One exception is the visible figure of an object functioning as a sign for its real figure. See *Inquiry*, VI.vii.

impression upon the organ of sense." Second, "The nerves which go from the brain to the organ, must receive some impression by means of that which was made upon the organ; and, probably, by means of the nerves, some impression must be made upon the brain." So far, these operations are entirely bodily. Third, there is an operation that bridges the bodily and the mental: "The impression made upon the organ, nerves, and brain, is followed by a sensation." It is only then that we have the purely mental operation of perception: "This sensation is followed by the perception of the object."[13] That is, the sensation is followed by a conception of the object and a belief in its present existence. The correspondence between sensations (signs) of hard objects and perceptions of hard objects is necessary for truth being the "natural issue" of our cognitive powers. But it is not sufficient. The other operations leading up to perception must also maintain a strict "correspondence" so that information is not lost in the "train of operations" resulting in the perceptual belief. If this correspondence is maintained, then there will be a correspondence between the initial impression of a hard object on the sense organ and the ultimate perception of a hard object:

> [A]s the impressions on the organs, nerves, and brain, correspond exactly to the nature and conditions of the objects by which they are made; so our perceptions and sensations correspond to those impressions, and vary in kind, and in degree, as they vary. Without this exact correspondence, the information we receive by our senses would not only be imperfect, as it undoubtedly is, but would be fallacious, which we have no reason to think it is.[14]

According to Reid, truth is the natural issue of our intellectual powers. By extension, truth is the natural issue of all those powers that are involved in the train of operations resulting in our beliefs. The truth of a perceptual belief depends on the truth-directedness

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[13] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxi, 174.

[14] Reid, *IP*, II.ii, 76; for additional discussions of correspondence, see *Inquiry*, IV.i, 49; V.iv, 62; VI.xxi, 177.

of every step in the perceptual "train of operations" that culminates in the perceptual belief.

When Reid claims truth is the natural issue of our intellectual powers, this is a claim primarily about our original, as opposed to acquired, intellectual powers.[15] The tactile perception of hardness, for instance, is an original perception, and as such it can "be resolved into particular [original] principles of the human constitution. Thus, . . . by one particular principle of our constitution, . . . a certain sensation signifies hardness in the body which I handle."[16] The connection between sensations of hard objects and belief in the present existence of hard objects is hard-wired into us. Put differently, the tactile sensation of hardness belongs to that class of signs "wherein the connection between the sign and thing signified, is not only established by nature, but discovered to us by a natural principle, without reasoning or experience."[17] According to Reid, original perceptual powers, and the original, particular principles of our constitution that underlie them, are truth-directed.

Acquired perceptual powers, at least when formed properly, are also truth-directed. This is because they arise through the interactions of 1) truth-directed particular principles of our constitution with 2) general principles of our constitution that are also truth-directed. The visual, acquired perception of the hardness of objects provides a good example of how this works. According to Reid, our only original perception of hardness is tactile. By an original, particular principle of our constitution, the tactile sensation of a

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[15] I discuss the differences between original and acquired intellectual powers in chapter 2.

[16] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 191.

[17] Ibid., V.iii, 60. This is the second of three classes of signs that Reid mentions. The tactile sensation of hardness belongs both to this class of signs and to the third class, thought it more properly belongs to the third class.

hard object occasions in us the perception of a hard object. When we have the visual sensations corresponding to hard objects, we do not, by an original principle of our constitution, perceive them as hard. However, we experience tactile perceptions of hardness conjoined with certain sorts of visual sensations—those visual sensations corresponding to hard objects. By the inductive principle of our constitution (a general principle), this experience of constant conjunction forms a mental association between certain visual appearances and belief in the present existence of a hard object. That is, the experience of constant conjunction forms what I have called an acquired particular principle of our constitution, one connecting certain types of visual appearances with the belief in the present existence of a hard object. This constitutional principle is the basis of acquired visual perceptions of hardness. Once we have acquired this principle, the visual appearance corresponding to a hard object will non-inferentially occasion in us the belief in the present existence of a hard object. This acquired visual perception of hard objects is truth-directed because 1) the original, tactile perception of hard objects is truth-directed,[18] and 2) the inductive principle, which connected tactile perceptions of hard objects with the corresponding visual appearances, is also truth-directed (what has been regularly conjoined in the past will generally be conjoined in the future).

Of course not all acquired perceptual powers are truth-directed.[19] For instance, we might associate two event types such that in the future we interpret the first as a sign of the latter, even though there is no real connection between them. This might happen when

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[18] The dependence upon original particular principles might not be direct. For instance, after acquiring the visual perception of hard objects, I might then use visual perceptions of hardness to acquire the auditory perception of hardness based on the way it sounds for a hard object to be struck. The truth-directedness of my auditory perception of hardness indirectly depends upon the truth-directedness of my tactile perception of hardness via the truth-directedness of my visual perception of hardness.

[19] Reid discusses the fallacies of the senses, including acquired perceptions, in *IP*, II.xxii.

we hastily associate two things that are coincidently conjoined in a traumatic experience. Perhaps as I am turning my vehicle left at a traffic light and shifting gears I am rear-ended by a truck. Next time I turn left at a traffic light as I shift gears, I find myself believing I am in imminent danger. As Reid notes in his correspondence, "such Associations [between signs and what we take them to signify] may not onely be formed by long continued habit, but sometimes by a single Act when it happens to be accompanied by some extraordinary Emotion or Passion."[20] Acquired perceptions formed on the basis of a single experience of conjunction are less likely to be truth-directed than are perceptions acquired through repeated experiences of conjunction. However, generally such acquired misperceptions "are gradually corrected by a more enlarged experience, and a more perfect knowledge of the laws of Nature."[21] As a result of experiencing the purported sign disjoined from that which we took it to signify, we come to disassociate the sign from that signification. For instance, a child might perceive all small brown birds as house finches. Upon further instruction and correction—for instance, being told that the small brown bird he is now looking at is not a house finch but a wren—the child's perceptions might be refined. He no longer perceives all brown birds as house finches, but only those brown birds of a certain size, a certain shape, and with certain markings.

To the extent that acquired perceptions and doxastic habits are within our control, their reliability sometimes depends upon a third condition: 3) sufficient intellectual virtue, or at least the absence of certain intellectual vices. For instance, rashness is one

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[20] Reid, *Correspondence*, 220. It is possible that some such associations result from principles of our constitution that are survival-directed rather than truth-directed.

[21] Reid, *IP*, II.xxii, 248.

vice responsible for many acquired perceptions and doxastic habits that are not truth-directed. If we are prone rashly to take one thing as a sign of another, we will form many acquired perceptual principles that are not truth-directed. As Reid states, "There must be many accidental conjunctions of things, as well as natural connections; and the former are apt to be mistaken for the latter."[22] When two things are accidentally conjoined in only a few instances, a rash person may come to take one as a sign of the other. Reid notes that "[o]mens, portents, good and bad luck, palmistry, astrology, all the numerous arts of divination, and of interpreting dreams, false hypotheses and systems, and true principles in the philosophy of nature, are all built upon the same foundation in the human constitution," the inductive principle. They "are distinguished only according as we conclude rashly from too few instances, or cautiously from a sufficient induction."[23] Even if we are not rash, if we are not properly attentive to various features of our experiences we may fail to identify the salient feature(s) as signs. For instance, after seeing numerous blue glass cups fall to the ground and break, and red plastic cups fall to the ground without breaking, the properly attentive person may come to see glass cups as liable to breaking upon being dropped. But an inattentive person may come to see blue cups as liable to breaking upon being dropped. Reid mentions a similar instance wherein a "child connected the pain of inoculation with the surgeon; whereas it was really connected with the incision only."[24] Proper caution in forming associations and attentiveness are two virtues important for developing truth-directed acquired perceptual powers. Additional roles that virtues play in Reid's epistemology will be discussed later.

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[22] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 199.

[23] Ibid., II.ix, 41.

[24] Ibid., VI.xxiv, 199.

2.2. Properly Functioning Faculties

While truth may be the natural issue of our cognitive faculties and the operations on which they depend, a variety of factors can thwart the natural functioning of these faculties, resulting in the production of false beliefs. Regarding "the natural issue of those faculties which God hath given" us, Reid writes, "Such a judgment can be erroneous only when there is some cause of the error, as general as the error is."[25] These causes come in a variety of forms: "Yet, as we are liable to various diseases of body from accidental causes, external and internal; so we are, from like causes, liable to wrong judgments."[26]

Some causes of error are physical disorders, either of our bodily organs that interface with the external world, such as our eyes, or of our nerves and brain:

> We can perceive external objects only by means of bodily organs; and these are liable to various disorders, which sometimes affect our powers of perception. The nerves and brain, which are interior organs of perception, are likewise liable to disorders, as every part of the human frame is.
>
> The imagination, the memory, the judging and reasoning powers, are all liable to be hurt, or even destroyed, by disorders of the body, as well as our powers of perception; but we do not on this account call them fallacious.[27]

Someone with jaundice, for instance, may mistake the colors of objects.[28] When his eyes are in this disordered state, they no longer deliver their natural issue of truth as regards the color of objects, though they may, of course, still be veridical as regards, say, the shape and location of objects. But, as Reid emphasizes, it would be incorrect in such situations to say that the perceptual organs are in and of themselves fallacious. It is rather

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[25] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 465. For a similar passage, see II.v, 98-99.

[26] Ibid., VI.viii, 527.

[27] Ibid., II.xxii, 243–244. A few pages later Reid similarly writes, "We must acknowledge it to be the lot of human nature, that all the human faculties are liable, by accidental causes, to be hurt and unfitted for their natural functions, either wholly or in part: But as this imperfection is common to them all, it gives no just ground for accounting any of them fallacious" (ibid., 251).

[28] Ibid., II.xxii, 251.

that they are fragile and have been "hurt and unfitted for their natural functions, either wholly or in part."[29]

Other causes of error are mental. For instance, regarding the "Lunatick [who] believes he is made of Glass," Reid writes that his belief is the "Effect of some Disorder of Mind or Body."[30] Mental disorders such as madness or lunacy undermine the truth-directedness of our intellectual faculties. Interestingly, Reid also notes that humans are liable to make wrong judgments when they lack certain intellectual virtues or possess certain intellectual vices. He discusses this extensively in essay VI, chapter viii of the *Intellectual Powers*, which he titles "Of Prejudices, the Causes of Errors." He there notes that "[a]s the active principles of the human frame are wisely contrived by the Author of our being for the direction of our actions, and yet, without proper regulation and restraint, are apt to lead us wrong; so it is also with regard to those parts of our constitution that have influence upon our opinions."[31] For instance, humans tend to rush from one extreme of belief to another.[32] When superstitions are exposed for what they are as science discovers the real causes of many natural phenomena, people tend to rush to the other extreme and "are apt to think, that all the phaenomena of Nature may be accounted for in the same way, and that there is no need of an invisible Maker and Governor of the world. . . . Thus, from the extreme of superstition, the transition is easy to that of atheism."[33] Those with the appropriate intellectual virtues will not, however, make this unjustified

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Reid, *Correspondence*, 219.

[31] Reid, *IP*, VI.viii, 528.

[32] Ibid., VI.vii, 514; VI.viii, 536.

[33] Ibid., VI.viii, 536.

leap from superstition to atheism. If their intellectual faculties are properly functioning, they will have "proper regulation and restraint."[34]

2.3. Faculties Functioning in an Appropriate Environment

When we are epistemically functioning properly—that is, when things *within us* are working according to their truth-directed design—an impression upon a sensory organ will initiate a train of operations resulting in the perception corresponding to that impression. But for our faculties reliably to deliver true beliefs, it must also be the case that things *outside us* are as they should be. There must, for instance, be a proper correspondence between the way the world is and the sorts of impressions it makes upon our sensory organs. That is, our faculties must not only be functioning properly, but be functioning in the environment for which they are designed to be truth-directed. Reid recognizes this point and notes that our knowledge of the world depends upon the constitution of both our environment and our mind: "The Author of Nature hath made provision for our attaining that knowledge of his works which is necessary for our subsistence and preservation, *partly by the constitution of the productions of Nature*, and *partly by the constitution of the human mind*."[35] If we are in the environment for which our faculties were designed, the constitution of the world and the constitution of our faculties correspond: hard things create in us sensations that trigger our belief in the present existence of something hard.

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[34] Much more could be said about proper function in Reid's epistemology. In general, all the characteristics of an epistemically competent adult that I discussed in chapter 3 could be applied to an epistemically properly functioning adult.

[35] Reid, *IP*, V.iv, 375. Emphases added.

If we are not in an appropriate epistemic environment, the natural deliverances of our faculties will likely be partially or wholly false.[36] For instance, Reid writers, "He that will judge of the colour of an object, must consult his eyes, in a good light, when there is no medium or contiguous objects that may give it a false tinge."[37] If we are looking at a white object in a room with a red light, the impression upon our eye will correspond to a red object, and we will therefore form the false belief that the object is red. Our perceptual beliefs may be correct in other respects—we may correctly believe the object is circular, and about two feet away from us—but perceptual judgments of color in such a room will not be reliable.

In the room illuminated with a red light, we have a case of properly-functioning, truth-directed perception that is false. This perception is false because we are not functioning in the environment for which that perceptual faculty is formed. I will use the phrase *design environment* to refer to the epistemic environment(s) for which original perceptions—and more broadly, original epistemic principles of our constitution—are designed to function in a truth-directed manner.[38] Properly functioning original epistemic principles will generally yield true beliefs when operating in the design environment. Because acquired doxastic principles, such as those involved in acquired perceptions, are not hard-wired parts of our constitution (our design), they do not properly speaking have

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[36] It is, of course, possible that our faculties are malfunctioning in ways that counteract the deleterious effects of being in an inappropriate environment. While our beliefs in such a situation might still be reliably true, they would not be justified. They would be reliably true by coincidence, and would not meet Reid's proper functionalist requirements.

[37] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 3.vi, 179.

[38] More generally, "design environment" might refer to all those epistemic environments that are relevantly or sufficiently similarly to the epistemic environment(s) for which our epistemic faculties are designed to function. While Plantinga does not, to the best of my knowledge, use the exact phrase "design environment," it is obviously inspired by his work. See Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*.

a design environment. But they do have an analogue, which I will call their *acquisition environment*. An acquisition environment is the environment within which an epistemic principle of our constitution was formed, or an environment that is relevantly similar. When properly formed and properly functioning, acquired epistemic principles will generally be truth-directed within their acquisition environment and in relevantly similar environments. Outside of the acquisition environment, however, they may not reliably produce true beliefs. Consider the acquired visual perception of straightness.[39] The visual perception of straightness is generally acquired in an environment where objects are not partially submerged in water. In that environment, objects with a certain appearance are felt to be straight, and we acquire the visual perception of straight objects. This visual perception of straightness is generally reliable in the acquisition environment—that is, an environment where objects are not partially submerged in water or some other liquid. But in an environment where straight objects are partially submerged in water, this visual perception of straightness will be unreliable. We see a stick poking out of the water, and we immediately believe it is not straight because it does not *look* like any of the straight objects that we have ever seen. It looks crooked. But it is actually straight. This acquired perception of straightness is unreliable in the new environment.

Acquired perceptions can, of course, have their acquisition environment enlarged through further experiences outside the original acquisition environment.[40] By feeling the straightness of partially submerged straight sticks, or pulling partially submerged straight

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[39] According to Reid, the visual perception of real figure is acquired. See, for instance, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiii.

[40] Reid gives a nice example this phenomenon in *Inquiry*, VI.xxii, 183-184. He there describes how visual perceptions acquired in un-foggy environments may be unreliable in a very foggy environment. As a result of further experiences in foggy environments, our visual perceptions can be refined to where they are also reliable in foggy environments.

sticks out of the water and seeing that they are really straight, we correct and refine our acquired perception of straightness. As a result of such corrections and refinements, the acquisition environment of our perceptions now includes objects that are and are not partially submerged in water. Consequently, we now perceive partially submerged straight objects as straight.

2.4. Responsiveness to Defeaters

Applying the language of defeaters to Reid's epistemology is, of course, anachronistic. I have also found some opposition to the claim that Reid has a defeater system in his epistemology.[41] It is nonetheless legitimate to speak of defeaters in Reid's epistemology. As I will show, Reid has a fairly clear and developed role for defeaters, and he actually distinguishes several types of them.[42]

Reid's defeater requirement for justification could be categorized as an aspect of his proper-functioning requirement: an epistemically properly functioning adult is appropriately responsive to defeaters.[43] I treat the defeater component as a separate element of Reid's proper-functionalism because defeaters raise considerations significantly different from, say, whether our eyesight is good or whether we have jaundice. Like the previous three requirements for justification and knowledge, proper responsiveness to defeaters is for Reid an externalist requirement. It is the *fact* of being or

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[41] This objection was raised to a paper I presented at the International Bicentennial Conference of the Center for the Study of Scottish Philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary on September 6, 2012.

[42] Philip de Bary speaks of defeaters within Reid's epistemology. See de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 84–86.

[43] This is how Plantinga categorizes responsiveness to defeaters in his proper-functionalist epistemology: "a belief *B* has warrant for you if and only if (1) the cognitive faculties involved in the production of *B* are functioning properly (and this is to include the relevant defeater systems . . .)" (*Warrant and Proper Function*, 194).

failing to be properly responsive to defeaters that affects one's justification; there is no requirement that one be aware of one's responsiveness to defeaters or be able to assess the appropriateness of one's responses. While proper responsiveness to defeaters is an externalist requirement, the defeaters themselves are things that one is aware of, and frequently they are beliefs.[44] For instance, Reid discusses how one of our beliefs should be affected by learning that someone else has a differing opinion on the matter. The extent that the other person's opinion should defeat our belief is determined not by how reliable he is, but rather by our *opinion* regarding his reliability: "Even in matters which we have access to know, authority always will have, and ought to have more or less weight, in proportion to the evidence on which our own judgment rests, and the *opinion* we have of the judgment and candour of those who differ from us, or agree with us."[45]

Because we are fallible, Reid emphasizes that we should be epistemically humble: "It becomes a fallible being to be modest, open to new light, and sensible, that by some false bias, or by rash judging, he may be misled."[46] Elsewhere Reid writes that "[a] man of candour and humility . . . will think it not impossible, that although his heart be upright, his judgment may have been perverted, by education, by authority, by party zeal, or by some other of the common causes of error, from the influence of which neither parts nor integrity exempt the human understanding."[47] As a moderate foundationalist, Reid acknowledges the fallibility of our epistemic faculties, yet he denies that being

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[44] For Reid, must defeaters be not only things one is aware of, but things one believes? Or is mere awareness of something sufficient for it to count as a defeater? This is a difficult question, and not one I will here attempt to settle. A key question for resolving this issue is how Reid understands evidence. As I note in chapter 7, Reid's understanding of evidence is very complex.

[45] Reid, *IP*, VI.viii, 528. Emphasis added.

[46] Ibid., VII.iv, 563.

[47] Ibid., VI.iv, 460.

aware of our fallibility constitutes a defeater. Infallibility is necessary for neither justification nor knowledge. The mere possibility that a belief could be false does not count as a defeater. A defeater must give us some reason to think a belief is false or has at least been formed in epistemically unfavorable circumstances. That is, for something to amount to a defeater, it must be "shewn" to be the case:

> Such a judgment [of a first principle] can be erroneous only when there is some cause of the error, as general as the error is: When this can be shewn to be the case, I acknowledge it ought to have its due weight. But to suppose a general deviation from truth among mankind in things self-evident, of which no cause can be assigned, is highly unreasonable.[48]

In addition to showing that the mere possibility of error does not amount to a defeater, this passage further shows that defeaters are internal factors. The mere presence of a cause of error, such as a malfunctioning epistemic faculty, might undermine justification and knowledge. But such a cause of error is not a defeater. For something to be a defeater, it must be "shewn" to be the case; it must be something that provides a good reason to doubt what one previously believed. If one is given good reason to think there is a cause of error for some belief, one has a defeater for that belief, regardless of whether or not there actually is a cause of error.

According to Reid, a proper awareness of our fallibility should influence both the original formation of our beliefs and subsequent evaluations of them. Regarding the original formation of our beliefs, the "wise man" or the "man of understanding"

> carries this conviction [of his fallibility] along with him *in* every judgment he forms. He knows . . . that he is more liable to err in some cases than in others. He

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[48] Ibid., VI.iv, 465–466. In the *Active Powers*, Reid similarly writes, "If a Philosopher would persuade me, that my fellow-men with whom I converse, are not thinking intelligent beings, but mere machines, though I might be at a loss to find arguments against this strange opinion, I should think it reasonable to hold the belief which nature gave me before I was capable of weighing evidence, *until convincing proof is brought against it*" (*AP*, IV.vi, 236, emphasis added).

> has a scale in his mind, by which he estimates his liableness to err, and by this he regulates the degree of his assent in his *first* judgment upon any point.[49]

In the formation of his judgments, the wise man is aware of his fallibility, both due to external factors, such poor lighting,[50] and due to internal factors, such disease, bias, rashness, or some strong passion. When he is aware of external or internal factors that increase his liableness to err in a judgment, his degree of assent in that judgment is proportioned to his liableness to err, "as far as to him appears reasonable."[51] Since the wise man might realize in certain circumstances that he is not merely liable to err, but likely to err, it follows that in some circumstances he might regulate his belief by *not* believing what he would otherwise be inclined to believe.[52]

The epistemically unfavorable factors that the wise man is responsive to *in the act of forming a belief* are not defeaters. Defeaters bear negatively upon a belief one has already formed. By contrast, the above factors are accounted for in the formation of a belief, in one's "*first* judgment upon any point." Apart from this distinction, however, such factors function very similarly to defeaters. I will call such factors *preemptors*. In a manner similar to the way defeaters defeat the rationality of retaining a belief, preemptors preempt the rationality of forming a belief in the first place. As rational beings, we should

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[49] Ibid., VII.iv, 569; see also 570. Emphases added.

[50] Philip de Bary seems to deny that for Reid being in an epistemically unfavorable environment (or *thinking* one is) can counts as a defeater: "these causes of error for Reid will be (and will *only* be) bodily and mental malfunctions" (de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 85, emphasis in the original; but see 159 for a passage that seems to counter this claim). I see no reason to accept this unsupported claim, and my considerations here and elsewhere give good reason to think it is false.

[51] Reid, *IP*, VII.iv.570.

[52] Indeed, in some cases the wise man might regulate his belief by believing something inconsistent with what he is inclined to believe. For instance, he may have learned that when it seems to him that a bird is a house finch, he is generally mistaken, for usually the bird is actually a house sparrow. As a result, he regulates his beliefs by believing he is seeing a house sparrow when it seems to him that he is seeing a house finch.

regulate our belief formation in response to preemptors. Borrowing from the literature on defeaters, we can distinguish between partial preemptors and complete preemptors. A *partial preemptor* for a belief is something an agent is aware of that counts epistemically against the belief and in response to which he should lessen his degree of assent when forming his original belief. A *complete preemptor* for a belief is something an agent is aware of that counts epistemically against the belief and in response to which he should not form that belief in the first place.[53]

According to Reid, a proper awareness of our fallibility should influence not only the original formation of our beliefs, but also subsequent evaluations of them. Part of the "proper allowance" for our fallibility is "being open to conviction" that we have made a false judgment.[54] That is, we should be responsive to defeaters for our beliefs. A careful examination of Reid's texts reveals an awareness of both undercutting and rebutting defeaters and an awareness of both partial and complete defeaters.

Reid compares a judgment of our faculties to the testimony of a witness, and this analogy helps illuminate the work of defeaters in his epistemology. According to Reid, testimony is a basic source of knowledge, and testimonial beliefs can be justified on externalist grounds: we can justifiedly believe what someone testifies, not because we have come to the conclusion that she is a reliable witness, but simply because, as an epistemically properly functioning human, we are constituted to believe the testimony of

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[53] Following the literature on defeaters, we might further distinguish between *undercutting preemptors* and *rebutting preemptors*. An undercutting preemptor for a potential belief might be the belief that the relevant epistemic faculty is malfunctioning. A rebutting preemptor might be evidence that a certain belief would be false.

[54] Reid, *IP*, VII.iv, 567. Elsewhere Reid similarly writes that "we ought to be firm and steady in adhering to such resolutions, while we are persuaded that they are right; but open to conviction, and ready to change our course, when we have good evidence that it is wrong" (*AP*, II.iii, 70).

others, all else being equal. If we examine a witness, however, some factors can confirm the reliability of the witness's testimony. The same applies to our beliefs: "The first judgment may be compared to the testimony of a credible witness; the second, after a scrutiny into the character of the witness, wipes off every objection that can be made to it, and therefore surely must confirm and not weaken his testimony." In other cases, however, an examination of the witness undermines his credibility:

> But let us suppose, that, in another case, I examine my first judgment upon some point, and find, that it was attended with unfavourable circumstances, what, in reason, and according to the rules of logic, ought to be the effect of this discovery?
>
> The effect surely will be, and ought to be, to make me less confident in my first judgment, until I examine the point anew in more favourable circumstances. If it be a matter of importance I return to weigh the evidence of my first judgment. If it was precipitate before, it must now be deliberate in every point. If at first I was in passion, I must now be cool. If I had an interest in the decision, I must place the interest on the other side.[55]

Reid is envisioning a situation where he forms a belief and subsequently discovers this belief was formed in "unfavourable circumstances." Perhaps it was formed hastily, while in a passion, or in accordance with a personal bias. The unfavorable circumstances Reid is aware of do not give evidence that his belief is *false*; they are not rebutting defeaters. They rather call into question whether his belief was formed in a reliable manner. This undermines—in this case, only partially undermines—the justification of his belief. Reid is here describing the appropriate response to an undercutting defeater.

Reid is also aware of rebutting defeaters. Consider the following passage. The person in question at first justifiedly believes a first principle, but as a result of encountering a competent person who denies this first principle, he acquires evidence that his belief is *false*. That is, he has a rebutting defeater.

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[55] Ibid., VII.iv, 568. For a relevant passage, see *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 194-195.

> But is it not possible, that men who really love truth, and are open to conviction, may differ about first principles?
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> I think it is possible, and that it cannot, without great want of charity, be denied to be possible.
>
> When this happens, every man who believes that there is a real distinction between truth and error, and that the faculties which God has given us are not in their nature fallacious, must be convinced that there is a defect, or a perversion of judgment on the one side or the other.
>
> A man of candour and humility will, in such a case, very naturally suspect his own judgment, so far as to be desirous to enter into a serious examination, even of what he has long held as a first principle.[56]

As a result of encountering evidence that his belief is false, the "man of candour and humility" will properly "suspect his own judgment." The fact that he *suspects* but does not give up his judgment suggests that what Reid here envisions is a partial rebutting defeater. The evidence against his belief does not overwhelm it, leading him to give up the belief or even believe the contrary. The rebutting defeater rather significantly lessens the justification of his belief. As a result, he "suspects" his belief, and doubtlessly regulates his degree of assent proportional to the defeater.

Reid discusses another rebutting defeater a few pages after the above passage:

> Suppose a Mathematician . . . commits his demonstration to the examination of a mathematical friend, whom he esteems a competent judge, and waits with impatience the issue of his judgment. Here I would ask again, Whether the verdict of his friend, according as it is favourable or unfavourable, will not greatly increase or diminish his confidence in his own judgment? Most certainly it will, and it ought.
>
> If the judgment of his friend agree with his own, especially if it be confirmed by two or three able judges, he rests secure of his discovery without farther examination; but if it be unfavourable, he is brought back into a kind of suspense, until the part that is suspected undergoes a new and a more rigorous examination.[57]

Once again, Reid imagines how one should respond to the differing opinion of someone else. In this passage, however, the other person is clearly an epistemic peer in the relevant

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[56] Ibid., VI.iv, 460.

[57] Ibid., VI.iv, 465.

area, someone "whom he esteems a competent judge." In response to such a peer disagreeing with one's judgment, one's confidence "will, and . . . *ought*" to be diminished. Indeed, if one has good reason to trust the judgment of the epistemic peer, one might be "brought back into a kind of suspense." This is an example a rebutting defeater that completely counters one's original justification. The appropriate response to such a defeater is not a diminished confidence, but suspense of judgment until one has performed further inquiry into the matter.

As the above examples of undercutting and rebutting defeaters show, Reid is also aware of the distinction between partial and complete defeaters. Having formed a belief, if the "man of understanding" "should afterwards find reason to suspect his first judgment, and desires to have all the satisfaction his faculties can give, reason will direct him . . . to examine the evidence of his first judgment carefully and coolly; and this review may very reasonably, according to its result, either strengthen or weaken, or totally overturn his first judgment."[58] In Reid's epistemology, a defeater can not only "weaken" a belief in various degrees, but can "totally overturn" it. Clearly, there are both partial and complete defeaters at work in Reid's epistemology.

A disregarded preemptor may become a defeater. For instance, perhaps a novice birdwatcher really wants to see a species of bird that is rare where he lives. One day near dusk he sees a bird at a distance and believes it is the rare bird he has been wanting to see. Ecstatic, he returns home to tell his wife. Plausibly, the birdwatcher has several preemptors for his belief. He is aware that the poor lighting, the distance of the sighting, and his lack of expertise in identifying birds make it likely that he may not have correctly

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[58] Ibid., VII.iv, 570.

identified the bird. He is also aware that he is liable to be influenced by his strong desire to see the rare bird. Disregarding these preemptors, he may nonetheless firmly believe he saw the rare bird and look forward to telling others about his sighting. Upon arriving at home, however, he may begin to doubt that he actually saw the rare bird. After all, it was rather dark, the bird was quite far away, he has only been bird watching for the past six months, and he was really hoping to see that rare bird. The preemptors which he disregarded when forming his belief have reappeared as defeaters.

While as rational beings we should regulate our beliefs in response to both preemptors and defeaters, we do not always do so. Reid notes that this is sometime due to a lack of intellectual virtue. For example:

> When a man is come to years of understanding, from his education, from his company, or from his study, he forms to himself a set of general principles, a creed, which governs his judgment in particular points that occur.
>
> If new evidence is laid before him which tends to overthrow any of his received principles, it requires in him a great degree of candour and love of truth, to give it an impartial examination, and to form a new judgment. Most men, when they are fixed in their principles, upon what they account sufficient evidence, can hardly be drawn into a new and serious examination of them.[59]

To respond properly to defeaters for our beliefs, especially defeaters for dearly held beliefs, we need intellectual virtues such as candor, love of truth, and humility; we need to be a "wise man" or "man of understanding." Sometimes, however, even an intellectually virtuous agent may not rationally regulate her belief in response to a defeater because she *cannot* regulate that belief. If a belief is strongly instinctive, it may not be very responsive to rational considerations, even if we are aware that we cannot

[59] Reid, *AP*, II.iii, 68.

rationally endorse it. In such cases, a defeater may "tend to shake" our "natural sentiments," but it "never can eradicate them."[60]

I have shown that Reid's proper functionalist epistemology has four key components, each of which is necessary for justification and knowledge. In normal circumstances, our beliefs are justified and we possess knowledge because we have truth-directed intellectual faculties that are functioning properly in an appropriate environment and we are properly responsive to defeaters. These are all externalist requirements. We do not have to form a belief about whether any or all of the above four conditions obtain in order to have justification or knowledge.[61] It is sufficient that they do in fact obtain.

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[60] Ibid., IV.xi, 268. Plantinga makes a similar point regarding defeaters for instinctive beliefs: "So he too has a defeater for *B*, and a good reason for being agnostic with respect to it. If he has no defeater for that defeater, and no other source of evidence, the right attitude toward *B* would be agnosticism. That is not to say that he would in fact be able to reject *B*. Due to that animal faith noted by Hume, Reid, and Santayana (but so-called only by the last-named), chances are he would not; still, agnosticism is what reason requires" (*Warrant and Proper Function*, 231).

[61] This is contra Douglas McDermid's claim that "Reid . . . assume[s] that we must know that our faculties are reliable before we can know anything else," which creates a "problem of epistemic circularity" (Douglas McDermid, "Thomas Reid on Moral Liberty and Common Sense," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (1999): 291, note 33).

CHAPTER FIVE

Foundationalism, Theism, and Boosting the Justification of First Principles

Reid's epistemology is standardly interpreted as a form of simple externalist foundationalism. First principles are justified on externalist grounds, and the justification of all other beliefs is purely a function of their being properly founded on first principles. In this chapter I will assume the standard foundationalist interpretation and argue that even on this interpretation theism can and does boost the justification of various first principles, including first principles of common sense concerned with the veridical nature of our faculties. This is in contrast to standard interpretations of the role of theism, according to which Reid's appeals to God are at best epistemically irrelevant and at worse dogmatic or even viciously circular. In the next chapter I will challenge the standard foundationalist interpretation by showing that Reid's epistemology is not a form of simple foundationalism. I will argue it contains coherentist strands and show how this further enables theism to boost the justification of first principles.

In section 1 I consider and reject the main views of the justificatory role of theism in Reid's epistemology: dogmatism, vicious circularity, and justificatory irrelevance. In section 2 I respond to a key obstacle to my arguments that theism can boost the justification of first principles. This obstacle is the widespread view that within Reid's epistemology first principles do not admit of inferential justification and cannot have their justification boosted. If the justification of first principles cannot be boosted, then it is impossible for theism to boost their justification. Answering this objection is crucial to

my arguments in this chapter and in the next two chapters. Indeed, the claim that in Reid's epistemology the justification of first principles can be boosted is perhaps the most fundamental thesis of this dissertation. This thesis underlies my arguments in chapters 5-7 for the positive justificatory role of theism.

In section 3 I show that within Reid's epistemology theistic arguments can and do boost the justification of first principles, including first principles of common sense concerned with the reliability of our faculties. This does not mean theism is necessary for justification or knowledge. As I argued in the previous chapter, first principles are justified on proper functionalist grounds, and this externalist justification does not require belief in God. Nonetheless, my arguments show that even on the standard foundationalist interpretation, theism can and does play a significant justificatory role in relation to first principles. Moreover, the boost in justification provided by theism is epistemically valuable. For instance, it might result in super-justified knowledge which is more resistant to defeaters, or it might provide the extra justification needed to restore a partially defeated first principle to the status of knowledge.

1. Mistaken Views of the Justificatory Role of Theism in Reid's Epistemology

There are three standard views regarding the positive justificatory role of theism in Reid's epistemology. According to the first two, all justification ultimately depends upon an appeal to a non-deceptive God. The difference between these two views is that according to the first Reid's appeal to God is dogmatic, but according to the second it is viciously circular. The third view claims that theism plays no justificatory role. Each view leaves something to be desired, motivating us to look for a better interpretation of theism's role in Reid's epistemology.

1.1. Dogmatism

According to one interpretation, Reid's major or only response to skeptical doubts regarding the reliability of our faculties is a dogmatic appeal to God and his beneficence and non-deception of his creatures. Advocates of this position include Richard Popkin,[1] J. H. Faurot,[2] and Norman Daniels. Daniels, for instance, writes that

> Reid's only defense against the skeptical outcome of his own nativism—namely, that our constitutions might lead us to systematically false beliefs—is his belief that God would not deceive us. . . . [Reid] slip[s] into dogmatism. God is guaranteeing our *knowledge* of the real world. . . . Reid justifies natively given 'common sense' beliefs through a dogmatic appeal to God as a nondeceiver.[3]

While Heiner Klemme does not claim Reid makes a dogmatic appeal to God, he seems to think that if Reid were to develop his providential naturalism, then he must ultimately make either a dogmatic or a viciously circular appeal to God.[4]

Some isolated passages might suggest Reid's epistemology depends upon a dogmatic appeal to God.[5] Reid's appeals are not, however, dogmatic, for he sees belief in God as grounded upon arguments.[6] Reid gives various arguments for God's existence and

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[1] Richard H. Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, ed. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1980), 68.

[2] J. H. Faurot, "The Development of Reid's Theory of Knowledge," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (1952): 231. Since Faurot claims "he [Reid] and Descartes were on identical grounds" in their dependence on theism, Faurot could plausibly be understood as claiming that Reid makes a viciously circular appeal to theism. However, Faurot claims that Reid rests "the credibility of our knowledge of the external world upon an antecedent belief in the good faith of the Creator," and that this belief "cannot be proved, and possibly did not need proving to Reid's generation" (ibid.).

[3] Daniels, *Thomas Reid's Inquiry*, 117, 118, 119–120. Daniels apparently questions these statements in the 2nd edition of his book.

[4] Heiner F. Klemme, "Scepticism and Common Sense," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 131–132.

[5] See, for example, *IP*, II.xx, 244, and VIII.iv, 595.

[6] While there is room in Reid's philosophy for theism to be properly basic, he never suggests this. For a partially Reid-inspired argument that theism can be properly basic, see Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*.

perfection in his *Lectures on Natural Theology*,[7] and the *Intellectual Powers* contains several theistic arguments, such as the argument from first cause and the design argument.[8] For Reid, God's existence is not something believed merely as an article of faith, and so he does not dogmatically employ it in defense of common-sense beliefs.

Moreover, given Reid's externalism and his moderate foundationalism, the justification of first principles does not normally require an appeal to anything or anyone, including God. Contra Daniels, the mere possibility "that our constitutions might lead us to systematically false beliefs" does not amount to a defeater for Reid. Hence, Reid's nativism does not lead to a "skeptical outcome." This undermines the motivation for a dogmatic appeal to God. We should seek a better interpretation of the role of theism in Reid's epistemology.

1.2. Vicious Circularity

Since Reid bases theism on arguments, it is natural that he is accused of circularly relying on his faculties to justify theism, and then using theism to justify his reliance upon his faculties. Sir Leslie Stephen made such an accusation in his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*,[9] and according to Edward Craig, "[T]here is more than a hint that the reliance on common sense is underpinned by a thoroughly Cartesian

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[7] Thomas Reid, *Lectures on Natural Theology (1780)*, ed. Elmer H. Duncan (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981). It should be noted that these are student lecture notes, and it is possible that Reid's interest in the arguments in these notes may not reflect his own conviction so much as curricular requirements. The tone of the notes, however, coupled with their agreement with the arguments found in the *Intellectual Powers*, suggests they reflect Reid's own convictions.

[8] See, for example, *IP*, II.vi, 103-104, and VI.vi, 508-509. While Reid speaks of "the existence and attributes of the Supreme Being, which is the only necessary truth I know regarding existence," he does not make any ontological arguments for God's existence (ibid., VI.iii, 443; see VI.v, 469 for a similar statement).

[9] Sir Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. I, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1902), 62–64.

appeal to the morals of the Maker of our faculties."[10] Similarly, Ernest Sosa has recently accused Reid, not of a dogmatic appeal to God, but of a viciously circular appeal:

> Reid eventually must face a problem of vicious circularity like the one he deems fatal to Descartes. . . . How can he regard himself as epistemically justified in believing that these faculties are God-given and accordingly truth-conducive?[11]

Reid seems to think we believe in the existence of finite beings through perceptions, and on the basis of these perceptual beliefs we reason to belief in God's existence and perfection.[12] Since the validity of theistic inferences depends on the correctness of our reasoning, and their soundness depends on the veridicality of our perceptions of contingent realities,[13] it is obvious that for Reid knowledge of God presupposes the veridicality of many of our faculties. Consequently, appealing to a non-deceptive God as the justification for trusting our faculties is clearly circular for Reid: it presupposes the reliability of our faculties in order to prove the existence of a non-deceptive God, who in turn justifies our original trust in our faculties. The reasoning comes full circle and is viciously circular on simple foundationalism.[14]

Does Reid attempt to escape skepticism via a viciously circular appeal to God? One problem with this interpretation is that Reid repeatedly and sometimes in detail

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[10] Edward Craig, review of *Thomas Reid*, by Keith Lehrer, *Ratio (New Series)* 3 (1990): 184.

[11] Ernest Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 59, 77. See also 74, note 8.

[12] See, for example, *IP*, VI.vii, 515, and Reid, *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 165 (AUL MS 2131/4/I/8a).

[13] Or perhaps on the veridicality of our self-consciousness, since Reid suggests a theistic argument can be based on one's own existence.

[14] This reasoning is not epistemically circular reasoning, which I consider below. In epistemically circular reasoning one already has justification for trusting one's faculties and the deliverances of one's faculties are already justified.

critiques Descartes for relying on just such a viciously circular appeal to God.[15] It is of course possible that Reid fell into the same circular reasoning. But it is desirable to find a plausible interpretation of the role of theism that does not require attributing to Reid such a blatant oversight and inconsistency.

More significantly, we have seen that Reid's epistemology is externalist. Reid can reply that justified higher-order beliefs about the reliability of our faculties are not required for knowledge. In ordinary circumstances, knowing *p* requires merely that one be justified in believing *p*. It does not require one to have any beliefs, justified or otherwise, about one's justification for believing *p*. Contra Sosa, Reid does not think we can trust our faculties "*simply* because [we believe] they come from God."[16] Our reliance on them is justified on externalist grounds. So Reid does not make a viciously circular appeal to God like the one he accuses Descartes of making. He does not think we are justified in trusting our faculties *simply* because we believe a good God created us. We should look for a better interpretation of theism's role in Reid's epistemology.

1.3. Justificatory Irrelevance

James Somerville and D. D. Todd are two philosophers who represent the third interpretation.[17] On this interpretation, theism plays no justificatory role in Reid's epistemology and is epistemically irrelevant. According to Somerville, Reid's discussions of God designing our faculties are "no more than pious reminders for the faithful" and

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[15] See, for example, Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 480–481.

[16] Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge*, 74, note 8.

[17] See also Daniel N. Robinson and Tom L. Beauchamp, "Personal Identity: Reid's Answer to Hume," *The Monist* 61, no. 2 (1978): 336 and 339, note 17; de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*.

"were probably regarded by him as little more than unremarkable pleasantries."[18] Todd asks, "Well, what are we to make of all those tedious and inconvenient invocations of God that are scattered about Reid's works?" He answers that "every reference to God in Reid's writings can be excised without diminishing his philosophy a significant whit."[19]

Part of the motivation for this interpretation seems to be the rejection of the above two views. If Reid's discussions of God designing our faculties are neither dogmatic nor viciously circular appeals to theism, then it seems they have no epistemic function left.[20] This reason for the irrelevancy interpretation would be undermined if there is another plausible interpretation for the role of theism in Reid's epistemology.

Also motivating the irrelevancy interpretation is the claim that Reid's first principles, including those about the veridical nature of our faculties, do not admit of inferential justification, and therefore do not admit of *theistic* inferential justification. As Somerville argues, "[I]f [Reid's] talk of God constituted an attempt actually to supply proof [that our faculties are veridical], it would be too palpably inconsistent with his assertion that no proof can be supplied" for first principles, including those first principles of common sense asserting the veridical nature of our faculties.[21]

This argument for the irrelevancy interpretation represents the most significant obstacle to the central thesis of this dissertation. The nearly universal consensus of the Reid scholars who have addressed this issue is that within Reid's epistemology first principles do not admit of inferential justification. On both textual and philosophical

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[18] Somerville, *The Enigmatic Parting Shot*, 347, 361.

[19] Todd, "An Inquiry into Thomas Reid," 387.

[20] Somerville, *The Enigmatic Parting Shot*, 354.

[21] Ibid., 357.

grounds, these scholars argue that the justification of Reid's first principles cannot be boosted. If this is true, then theism cannot boost the justification of first principles. In particular, theism cannot boost our justification in believing those first principles of common sense concerned with the veridical nature of our faculties.

In section 2 I respond to the key objection that Reid's first principles do not admit of inferential justification. What should be noted here is that Reid's epistemological writings frequently suggest theism supplies some additional justification for numerous first principles, including the belief that our faculties are veridical and trustworthy. For instance, Reid writes, "And now I yield to the direction of my senses, not from instinct only, but from confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor."[22] Such passages strongly suggest that Reid's references to God are not merely "unremarkable pleasantries," contra Somerville. Such appeals to God also undermine the significance of Todd's claim that "[n]owhere that I have been able to find does Reid resort to an appeal to God as a step in an argument designed to support one or another of his philosophical doctrines."[23] Because of such epistemically significant appeals to God, we should reject the justificatory irrelevance interpretation if 1) the above key objection can be answered and if 2) there exists a reasonable interpretation which accounts for the justificatory role that theism seems to play in Reid's epistemology.

The dogmatism interpretation fails to recognize the rationality and philosophical grounds of theism, as well as the externalism of Reid's epistemology. The vicious circularity interpretation appreciates the rational grounds of theism, and it also has the

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[22] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 170. Additional relevant passages are considered in section 3 and in the following chapters.

[23] D. D. Todd, "Review: *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation: Papers Relating to the Life Sciences*," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 37, no. 1 (1998): 208.

virtue of taking seriously theism's apparent justificatory role. Its problem is that it makes theism necessary for knowledge. Reid's epistemology becomes viciously circular, and he commits the same fallacy he accuses Descartes of making. The justificatory irrelevance interpretation takes seriously the externalism of Reid's epistemology, but it does not make sense of the apparent justificatory role of theism. Is there a better interpretation, one that makes sense of the apparent justificatory role of theism? Before considering that question, I must establish that there is room in Reid's epistemology for theism to play a justificatory role.

2. Arguing for First Principles: A Response to the No Justification Boosting Thesis

According to Reid, the foundation of our knowledge consists of first principles, things that we know in an immediate, non-inferential fashion.[24] As we have seen, these first principles are justified on externalist grounds, and all other justified beliefs are properly based on them.[25] Being justified on externalist grounds, first principles do not require reasoning for their justification. But there is a difference between not requiring reasoning for justification and not admitting of justification from reasoning. Most Reid scholars who have addressed this issue think that within Reid's epistemology first principles not only do not require reasoning for their justification, but that they do not

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[24] Reid notes, "The belief of first principles is not an act of the reasoning power: For all reasoning must be grounded upon them. We judge them to be true, and believe them without reasoning" (Reid, *IP*, VII.iv, 572).

[25] According to Reid, "In all rational belief, the thing believed is either itself a first principle, or it is by just reasoning deduced from first principles" (Reid, *AP*, V.i, 270).

admit of justification from reasoning.[26] That is, most Reid scholars agree with what I will call the No Justification Boosting Thesis.[27]

> *No Justification Boosting Thesis* (hereafter simply the Boosting Thesis): In Reid's epistemology, it is impossible to boost the justification of a first principle by means of an argument (deductive or inductive) for the truth of that principle. That is, the only justification first principles can possess is that which they enjoy by virtue of being first principles. First principles do not admit of inferential justification.[28]

For instance, if it is a first principle that there is a swan in front of me, then according to the Boosting Thesis I cannot boost the justification of this principle by inferring its truth from other principles. Reid's writings invite this interpretation, which is now standard. This thesis has been accepted, sometimes with minor qualifications, by Peter Baumann, Philip de Bary, John Greco, James Harris, Dennis Holt, Heiner Klemme, Keith Lehrer, Douglas McDermid, Sabine Roeser, Patrick Rysiew, James Somerville, Paul Vernier, and D. D. Todd.[29] If the Boosting Thesis is true, then within Reid's epistemology first

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[26] An exception is Louis Loeb. In an endnote, Loeb writes, "Reid allows that a first principle can be strengthened or confirmed by argument—either by inductive argument . . . , or by relying on first principles to establish the existence of a benevolent God" (Louis E. Loeb, "The Naturalisms of Hume and Reid," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 81, no. 2 (2007): 88 note 42).

[27] I thank James Van Cleve for suggesting that I use this title for the thesis. I originally called it the No-Inference Thesis, which did not capture the essence of the thesis.

[28] Given that at least many first principles are person-specific (e.g., many of my perceptual first principles are not first principles for you), we might more technically say the thesis is that if a principle that is believed by *S* is a first principle for *S*, then it is impossible for *S* to boost the justification that principle enjoys just by virtue of being a first principle. It is, for instance, impossible for *S* to acquire additional justification for that principle by inferring its truth.

[29] Baumann, "The Scottish Pragmatist?" 49, 51; Peter Baumann, "On the Subtleties of Reidian Pragmatism: A Reply to Magnus," *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (2004): 73–77; de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 72, 87 note 19, 130–138, 149; John Greco, "How to Reid Moore," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52, no. 209 (2002): 559, 559 footnote 16; James A. Harris, "On Reid's 'Inconsistent Triad': A Reply to McDermid," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2003): 122–123, 126–127; Dennis Charles Holt, "The Defence of Common Sense in Reid and Moore," in *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*, ed. Melvin Dalgarno and Eric Matthews (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 147–148, 154; Klemme, "Scepticism and Common Sense," 128; Keith Lehrer and John-Christian Smith, "Reid on Testimony and Perception," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 11 (1985): 33–37; Keith Lehrer, "Reid, the

principles cannot have any justification besides that which they enjoy by virtue of their status as first principles.

The traditional view means that if I were to have a defeater (either undercutting or rebutting, partial or complete) for a first principle, then I could not increase my justification for that principle by means of reasoning to its truth. I could increase my justification for that principle only by defeating its defeater. Moreover, if the Boosting Thesis is true, a first principle cannot receive inferential justification that might upgrade it to another level or grade of knowledge. Finally, since it is a first principle of common sense that our faculties are veridical, the Boosting Thesis entails that it is impossible to boost our justification for thinking that our faculties are veridical. If this is the case, then it is impossible for theism to boost our justification for thinking our faculties are veridical. Somerville makes this very argument: "[I]f [Reid's] talk of God constituted an attempt actually to supply proof [that our faculties are veridical], it would be too palpably inconsistent with his assertion that no proof can be supplied" for first principles, including those first principles of common sense asserting the veridical nature of our faculties.[30] As I have noted, this argument represents the most significant obstacle to the central thesis of this dissertation.

Moral Faculty, and First Principles," in *Reid on Ethics*, ed. Sabine Roeser (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 26; but see my comments on Lehrer's position in footnote 48; McDermid, "Reid on Moral Liberty," 295; Sabine Roeser, "Introduction: Thomas Reid's Moral Philosophy," in *Reid on Ethics*, ed. Sabine Roeser (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4, but see 6 and 8; Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," 444–445; Somerville, *The Enigmatic Parting Shot*, 357–362; but a passage on 359 does not fit well with Somerville's general position; Paul Vernier, "Thomas Reid on the Foundations of Knowledge and His Answer to Skepticism," in *Thomas Reid: Critical Interpretations*, ed. Stephen F. Barker and Tom L. Beauchamp (Philadelphia: Philosophical Monographs, 1976), 18, 22; Todd, "Review: *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*," 207–208.

[30] Somerville, *The Enigmatic Parting Shot*, 357.

Against this interpretive tradition, I argue that the No Justification Boosting Thesis is false. In section 2.1 I clarify the Boosting Thesis. In section 2.2 I respond to the philosophical grounds that have been given for the Boosting Thesis. In section 2.3 I respond to the textual grounds for the claim that Reid endorsed the Boosting Thesis. I conclude my response in section 2.4 by considering Reid's reasons for thinking that arguments for the truth of first principles, while often possible and sometimes helpful, are epistemically dangerous and should therefore be used with care.

2.1. The Traditional View: "No (Direct) Arguments for First Principles"

According to the traditional view, Reid's first principles cannot receive any justification in addition to that which they enjoy by being properly basic; there cannot be arguments for the truth of first principles. Two things should be noted about the Boosting Thesis. First, it is not making the surface-level claim that first principles, understood in the *de dicto* sense of principles justifiedly held non-inferentially, cannot receive their justification inferentially. This is analytic and trivially true, similar to the claim that the one hundredth sentence of Reid's *Inquiry*, *qua* the one hundredth sentence of the *Inquiry*, could not have been the one hundred and first sentence of the *Inquiry*. The Boosting Thesis is the substantive claim that within Reid's epistemology first principles (in the *de re* sense) cannot receive inferential justification.

Second, the Boosting Thesis does not entail that we cannot reason about first principles. In particular, many of the Reid scholars who accept the Boosting Thesis also state that within Reid's epistemology it is possible to argue that a principle is a first

principle. This is not, however, an argument for the truth of the principle, but only for its status as a first principle.[31] Paul Vernier, for instance, writes,

> Non-inferential first principles are . . . wholly unamenable to positive argumentation. . . . Although first principles are not subject to demonstrative proof or positive philosophical argumentation, there are, according to Reid, marks of authenticity by which we can distinguish first principles from 'vulgar errors.'[32]

Patrick Rysiew, Philip de Bary, and James Harris have made similar statements to this effect.[33] This idea is sometimes expressed by noting that it is impossible to offer "direct" arguments for first principles.[34] Rysiew, for instance, writes that because "the appeal to external evidence has already been ruled out, the confirmation cannot take the form of direct justification, and must instead consist in the indirect justification of a first principle." He proceeds to enumerate the indirect arguments for first principles that Reid endorses, noting that "there are (at least) five types of argument which can be used in non-evidence-based confirmations of first principles."[35] Rysiew emphasizes that these are

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[31] While such an argument is not yet an argument for the truth of a first principle, it is worth noting that it is very easily turned into a justification boosting argument. Consider the following argument: 1) *p* is a first principle; 2) if *p* is a first principle, *p* is likely true; so, 3) *p* is likely true. It appears that the only way to avoid such arguments while affirming the first premise is to deny that we can know the second premise. I think one would be hard pressed, however, to deny that according to Reid most first principles are true, and that we can be justified in believing this. So it seems that if one acknowledges that we can argue a principle is a first principle, it is difficult not also to admit that we can argue a first principle is true and thereby boost its justification.

[32] Vernier, "Reid on the Foundations of Knowledge," 20, 18.

[33] Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," 444, 445; de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 131–132; Harris, "On Reid's 'Inconsistent Triad'," 122–123, 126–127.

[34] *Pace* Rysiew and others, I do not think this is a correct understanding of what Reid means by a "direct" argument. I discuss this issue below.

[35] Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," 444, 445. According to Rysiew, "These strategies are: (1) an 'argument *ad hominem*', showing some inconsistency in the denial of one first principle on the basis of another which is on the same epistemic footing; (2) an informal *reductio ad absurdum*, whereby denial of the first principle in question is shown to lead to absurdity; (3) an argument from the consent of the learned and unlearned across time; (3a) an argument from the common structure of all languages; (4) an argument from the *prima facie* primitiveness of some first principles; and (5) an argument from the practical indispensability of a first principle" (ibid.; Rysiew cites *IP*, VI.iv).

not arguments for the truth of first principles: "To repeat, these are strategies for defending first principles as first principles, and are not intended as arguments for their truth."[36] De Bary agrees.[37]

The main grounds Reid scholars have given for the No Justification Boosting Thesis are 1) their understanding of the nature and role of first principles within Reid's epistemology (philosophical grounds for the truth of the thesis), and 2) their interpretation of some statements of Reid that purportedly show he endorses this thesis (purely textual grounds).

2.2. Philosophical Considerations

Several Reid scholars suggest that the foundational status of first principles makes it impossible to provide arguments for their truth. For instance, according to Dennis Holt, because first principles "are foundational, it is not possible to provide constructive, independent grounds for their acceptance. . . . They cannot of course be supported by evidence or demonstration, since they are the ground of all evidence and demonstration."[38] Rysiew similarly writes that "the idea of demonstration from something *more* basic is quite simply in conflict with the rock-bottom status of our basic beliefs. In addition to thus ruling out any deductive arguments for the first principles, Reid also discounts the relevance of inductive support, and hence the prospect of

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[36] Ibid., 445. John Greco similarly qualifies his claim that "[i]n Reid's terminology, our knowledge that external things exist is a first principle, and therefore does not admit of proof," by noting that actually Reid denies the possibility of *direct* arguments for first principles: "More exactly, such things do not admit of direct proof. Reid thinks that first principles can sometimes be proved indirectly, by *reductio ad absurdum*" (Greco, "How to Reid Moore," 559, 559 footnote 16; in the footnote, Greco cites *IP*, VI.iv). Since Greco does not elaborate on how he understands a "direct" proof, I am not certain whether he understands it in the same sense as Rysiew.

[37] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 131–132.

[38] Holt, "The Defence of Common Sense in Reid and Moore," 147, 154.

appealing to probabilistic reasoning."[39] Likewise, Sabine Roeser comments that "self-evident beliefs cannot be proven," for "we cannot convince [someone] using arguments based on more fundamental premises that would establish the belief at stake as conclusion because there are simply no more basic beliefs involved."[40] In response to the question "Why don't [the first principles of common sense] *admit* of proof?" Peter Baumann responds, "Well, according to Reid, our knowledge bears a deductive structure and all justification must come to an end somewhere. It comes to an end at the fundamental principles of common sense on which all knowledge is based."[41]

Rysiew and Roeser are doubtlessly correct that it would be impossible to argue for the truth of a first principle "from something *more* basic." Since first principles are the absolute foundation of knowledge, there is nothing *more* basic than a first principle. And if there is nothing more basic, then one cannot argue for a first principle "from something *more* basic." But why think that to argue for the truth of a first principle, one must argue from something *more* basic? To argue for the truth of a first principle, one would obviously have to argue from things that are equally or less basic. Why isn't that possible?

Perhaps Rysiew's and Roeser's thought is that there is something about "the rock-bottom status of our basic beliefs" that makes arguments for their truth impossible. This seems to be Holt's and Baumann's view: because first principles are the foundation of

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[39] Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," 444. Emphasis in the original.

[40] Roeser, "Introduction," 4. It is not immediately clear how to reconcile Roeser's claims on this page with his claims on pages 6 and 8.

[41] Baumann, "The Scottish Pragmatist?" 49. Emphasis in the original. I take all of these Reid scholars to be claiming that for each first principle, there is not a good argument that it is a true principle. I do not think they are claiming that for the set of all first principles, there is not a good argument that the set of first principles is true.

our knowledge—because they are "the ground of all evidence and demonstration," the place where "all justification [comes] to an end"—there cannot be arguments for their truth. For if there were arguments for their truth, they would not be foundational. These philosophical grounds for the Boosting Thesis might be summarized in the following argument:

1) A first principle has non-inferential justification.[42]
2) If we inferred the truth of a first principle, then that first principle would have inferential justification.
3) So, we cannot infer the truth of a first principle.

Depending on how it is interpreted, either this argument is invalid or it begs the question. First, the invalid interpretation. For the argument to be a form of *modus tollens* as it appears to be, 1) must deny the consequent of 2). But it does not: 1) does not deny that a first principle can or does have inferential justification; it claims only that at least *some* of its justification is non-inferential. Since it is possible for a principle to have two kinds of justification, inferential and non-inferential, the fact that a first principle has non-inferential justification does not entail that it does not also have inferential justification. So the argument is invalid.

The argument also admits of a valid interpretation, but on this reading it begs the question. The first premise can be read such that it *is* the denial of the consequent of 2). It can be read as "a first principle has non-inferential justification and *only* non-inferential justification." But to claim that a first principle has *only* non-inferential justification just is to claim that there cannot be good arguments (inferences) to its truth that boost its

[42] That is, first principles have a "rock-bottom status" (Rysiew), are "the ground of all evidence and demonstration" (Holt), are the place where "all justification [comes] to an end" (Baumann).

justification. On this reading, premise 1) *is* the No Justification Boosting Thesis, so the argument begs the question. Moreover, this exclusionary claim is not part of the definition of a first principle. A first principle is one that has some non-inferential justification.[43] But having some non-inferential justification does not exclude the possibility of also having some inferential justification.

There is another philosophical argument that Reid's first principles do not admit of inferential justification. According to this argument, vicious circularity infects all arguments for the truth of first principles, and especially arguments for the truth of those first principles asserting the veridical nature of our faculties. Since I will argue in chapter 6 that Reid's epistemology contains coherentist strands, I deny that circularity is necessarily vicious. Some circular arguments are coherence-building and virtuous even though they would be vicious on simple foundationalism. My main concerns in this section, however, are to show that 1) there is nothing about the nature of first principles that is incompatible with them receiving inferential justification, and that 2) even on the standard, foundationalist interpretation, Reid's first principles admit of inferential justification. The present question is whether, given the standard foundationalist interpretation, all arguments for the truth of first principles are viciously circular. I will show they are not. Two types of arguments can boost the justification of a first principle, even a first principle concerned with the veridical nature of one or more faculties. The first type of argument does not involve any circularity, and the second involves only epistemic circularity, which is acceptable on foundationalism.

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[43] At least, absent undefeated defeaters. I do not here attempt to determine whether a first principle must further have some minimum amount of non-inferential justification—say, enough to qualify as knowledge.

According to Somerville, the veridical nature of our faculties is "so fundamental that any attempted proof would presuppose what is to be proved." First principles "cannot themselves be subject to investigation or justification precisely because they are themselves presupposed in any investigation or justification."[44] Douglas McDermid likewise claims that "whenever we try to validate any of our basic cognitive faculties, we cannot avoid presupposing the truth of what we are trying to prove. Consequently, we cannot rationally justify our faith in the reliability of our cognitive faculties—something to which Reid explicitly called attention."[45] A passage from Rysiew suggests he would endorse this line of reasoning,[46] and de Bary similarly claims that any track-record "argument will depend for its cogency, sooner or later, on the prior acceptance of the principle it is designed to confirm."[47] Lehrer and Smith also claim that first principles "do not admit of proof" because "[a]ny attempt to prove a first principle leads to a circle and begs the question."[48, 49] Holt claims that because first principles "are foundational, it is

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[44] Somerville, *The Enigmatic Parting Shot*, 357, 362.

[45] McDermid, "Reid on Moral Liberty," 291.

[46] "Reid fully accepts that the contingent basic beliefs of common sense cannot without circularity be given demonstrative proof" (Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," 444).

[47] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 153.

[48] Lehrer and Smith, "Reid on Testimony and Perception," 35. This claim is puzzling, as is Lehrer's general denial that first principles admit of inferential justification. First, Lehrer is famous for emphasizing what he often calls Reid's "first first principles," according to which our faculties are veridical. According to Lehrer, "[T]he First First Principle vouches for the truth of all the rest and is a premise telling us that they are not fallacious. Moreover, . . . the principle vouches for the truth of itself in the same way" (Lehrer, "Reid, the Moral Faculty, and First Principles," 26). It is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile this with Lehrer's claims (as quoted in the main text above) that first principles do not admit of inferential evidence. Indeed, on the same page as his claim that "the First First Principle vouches for the truth of all the rest and is a premise telling us that they are not fallacious," Lehrer notes that "Reid says that first principles of our faculties do not admit of proof just because they are first principles" (Ibid.). Lehrer's affirmation of the Boosting Thesis is secondly puzzling given that he claims Reid's epistemology contains coherentist elements. If this is the case, why is it vicious for an argument to presuppose what it is attempting to establish? Such circular reasoning might be coherence building and hence virtuous. Incidentally, Lehrer maintained his affirmation of the Boosting Thesis during the question and answer

not possible to provide constructive, independent grounds for their acceptance."[50] Finally, according to William Alston,

> Reid's most distinctive and important point about fundamental epistemic principles is a negative one. . . . Situated as we are, it is a vain hope to think that we could give a non-circular rational justification of the reliability, or unreliability, of our basic cognitive faculties. Just because they are basic, they constitute an indispensable access to the facts we need to make a judgment on the issue.[51]

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period following my presentation of a paper in 2012 ("Does Theism Play a Plantingian Role in Reid's Epistemology?" International Bicentennial Conference of the Center for the Study of Scottish Philosophy, Princeton Theological Seminary, September 6, 2012).

[49] Lehrer and Smith quote two passages from Reid in support of their claim that all arguments for first principles are circular (Lehrer and Smith, "Reid on Testimony and Perception," 35, 36). These passages do not, however, provide textual grounds for this claim. Both passages are within Reid's discussion of the seventh first principle of contingent truths, according to which our faculties are not fallacious (*IP*, VI.v, 480-482). Reid's point in these passages is that any argument that *our faculties taken as a unit* are not fallacious would take for granted what it is attempting to establish. This is correct. That this is Reid's point is clear from the first passage quoted by Lehrer and Smith: "Another first principle is, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious. If any man should demand a proof of *this* [emphasis added], it is impossible to satisfy him . . . ; because, to judge of a demonstration, a man must trust his faculties, and take for granted the very thing in question" (*IP*, VI.v, 480). Reid's point is not that any argument for *any* first principle must take for granted what it is attempting to establish. It is rather that any argument for the reliability of our faculties taken as a unit must take for granted what it is attempting to establish. I further discuss this passage below in section 3.3. The second passage quoted by Lehrer and Smith reads, "Every kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties, amounts to no more than taking their own testimony for their veracity; and this we must do implicitly" (*IP*, VI.v, 481). To support Lehrer and Smith's claim, this passage needs to be read as "Every kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties *taken individually*. . . ." But the context makes clear that Reid means "Every kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties *as a unit*. . . ."

[50] Holt, "The Defence of Common Sense in Reid and Moore," 147.

[51] Alston, "Reid on Epistemic Principles," 448; see also 443, 445, and 450 note 38. In his later writings Alston is much more optimistic regarding epistemic circularity, as we will see below. In "Reid on Epistemic Principles," Alston cites several passages from Reid in support of his claim. I will here briefly deal with some of the main ones. a) For a response to the passage Alston quotes on pages 444-445 (*IP*, VI.v, 481), see footnote 49 above and section 3.3 below. b) Near the top of page 444, Alston cites two passages from *IP*. I deal with the second (*IP*, VI.iv, 463) below in section 2.3. Regarding the first passage, Alston claims that "Reid, in his most considered utterances on the subject, explicitly disavows any intention of constructing such arguments" for first principles. The passage he quotes in support reads, "There are ways by which the evidence of first principles may be made more apparent when they are brought into dispute; but they require to be handled in a way peculiar to themselves. Their evidence is not demonstrative, but intuitive. They require not proof, but to be placed in a proper point of view" (*IP*, I.ii, 41). Reid does not here claim that first principles *admit not* proof, but only that they "require not proof." Furthermore, when Reid states that "their evidence is not demonstrative," he is not claiming they do not admit of inferential evidence, but only that their evidence *qua first principles*—qua principles with non-inferential evidence—is not demonstrative. c) Regarding the quotations on pages 445-446: according to Alston, the conviction that circularity infects all arguments for the veridicality of a faculty "is implied in [Reid's] key 'undue partiality' argument against the Humean skeptic" (445). Alston is correct that a key

Somerville's claims are ambiguous. If his point is that any attempted proof of the veridicality of our faculties *taken as a unit* "would presuppose what is to be proved," he is right. Any such proof would have to employ several of our faculties, and would therefore presuppose at least part of what it was attempting to establish. But I suspect that, like de Bary, McDermid, Alston, and Lehrer and Smith, he means that any argument for the veridicality of a particular faculty "would presuppose what is to be proved."[52] This claim is mistaken. Consider the following argument form:

> A, B, and C are basic sources of knowledge. A and B supply justified beliefs *a* and *b*. Faculty A, inferring from *a* and *b*, provides justification for the belief that C is trustworthy.

If it is a first principle that C is trustworthy, one will already have some non-inferential justification for believing C is trustworthy. But the above argument will provide additional justification for the belief that C is trustworthy, boosting the justification of this first principle. This inferential justification will be noncircular and foundationalist. Hence, even on the standard foundationalist interpretation of Reid, it is in principle possible inferentially to boost the justification of a first principle concerning the

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element of Reid's response to the partial skeptic is the accusation of undue partiality: the partial skeptic is not justified in picking and choosing which faculties to trust. By parity, the partial skeptic should either accept or reject all faculties as veridical. Thus understood, Reid's parity argument against the partial skeptic does not "imply" a conviction that no noncircular argument can be given for any of our faculties. Hence, Reid's "undue partiality" argument need not be read as supporting Alston's point.

[52] Regarding the circularity point, Alston writes, "[T]he point has to be established separately for each such principle. If, e.g., one could establish the relevant premises without assuming the reliability of memory, then the parallel argument for the reliability of memory would not be subject to epistemic circularity." Alston denies the possibility of such arguments, however: "I believe that epistemic circularity does infect all otherwise not implausible attempts to argue for the reliability of basic cognitive faculties; but I will not be able to go into that in this paper." Alston claims that Reid, too, denies this possibility, at least as regards perception: "The above statement leaves open the possibility that one could establish the veracity of, e.g., perception, by exclusive reliance on other faculties. Reid takes it to have been established by Hume that this cannot be done, but that still leaves various arguments for other faculties to be explored" ("Reid on Epistemic Principles," 450 note 38; 445). However, Alston gives absolutely no support for this claim, either in the form of an argument or by citing a relevant passage from Reid.

veridicality of some particular faculty. I will consider a fleshed-out example of such a noncircular argument below in section 3.1.

On the standard interpretation it is also possible to boost the justification of first principles through arguments that involve a special kind of circularity. William Alston has called this *epistemic circularity*.[53] An epistemically circular argument is one that presupposes a faculty is veridical in arguing that it is veridical. The conclusion does not appear in any of the premises, but knowledge of one or more of the premises requires the truth of the conclusion. As Van Cleve has noted,[54] Alston is much more optimistic regarding epistemic circularity in his later writings.[55] I follow Van Cleve and the later Alston in this optimism.

Consider the following example of an epistemically circular argument, which Alston calls a track-record argument:[56]

1. At t_1, I formed the perceptual belief that p, and p.
2. At t_2, I formed the perceptual belief that q, and q.

(and so on)

Therefore, sense perception is a reliable source of belief.

After reflecting on a number of perceptual beliefs, we note they are usually true and inductively conclude that perception is reliable.

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[53] William Alston, "Epistemic Circularity," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47, no. 1 (1986): 1–30.

[54] Van Cleve, "Reid on First Principles," 27 note 24.

[55] For two optimistic treatments of epistemic circularity, see Alston, "Epistemic Circularity," and William Alston, *The Reliability of Sense Perception* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), chapter 2. Alston is skeptical of epistemic circularity in "Reid on Epistemic Principles."

[56] I have borrowed Van Cleve's formulation of this argument. See Van Cleve, "Reid on First Principles," 13.

Assuming reliabilism about knowledge, it is only because the conclusion of this argument is true that I am able to know each of the premises. For each premise, introspection and reflection may be sufficient for knowledge of the first part of the premise: "At t_n, I formed the perceptual belief that *x*." But my knowledge of the last part of each premise—"and *x*"—must depend on perception at one point or another. So knowledge of each of the premises requires the truth of the conclusion. But knowledge of each of the premises does not require knowledge of the conclusion. My knowledge of the premises requires only the *fact* that the conclusion is true.

An epistemically circular argument is circular in that the *truth* of its conclusion is a necessary condition for knowledge of its premises, and it is based on knowledge of these premises that one comes to *know* the conclusion. Such an argument presupposes the truth of its conclusion, but it does not come full circle. The end point—*knowing* perception is reliable—is not one of the beginning points. The beginning points are particular perceptual beliefs, which only required the *truth* of the conclusion. Such epistemically circular arguments can be acceptable on foundationalist grounds.[57] The fact that perception is reliable accounts for the justification of the perceptual beliefs, and the justification of these beliefs is transferred by induction to the conclusion that perception is reliable. These are all foundationalist moves. So epistemically circular arguments, or arguments that take for granted the reliability of the faculty whose reliability is being established, can be acceptable on foundationalist grounds. As Alston notes, "[E]ven where an argument for reliability involves epistemic circularity, as it does with basic sources [of knowledge], one may still justify, and be justified in, the reliability claim by

[57] In section 3.3 I consider cases where epistemically circular arguments are not acceptable.

virtue of basing it on the reasons embodied in the epistemically circular argument."[58] As long as the conclusion is in fact true, such arguments can provide justification for thinking that the faculty in question is reliable.

Discussions of epistemic circularity tend to focus on arguments that provide knowledge of a previously unknown truth regarding the reliability of one or more faculties. It is not, however, necessary that the conclusion be previously unknown. If, as Reid claims, the reliability of our faculties is a self-evident first principle, this does not prevent epistemically circular arguments from boosting the justification of that first principle. Consider once again the track-record argument that perception is reliable. While it might be a first principle that perception is reliable, the numerous perceptual beliefs necessary to get the track-record argument going are not based on this belief that perception is reliable.[59] The perceptual beliefs are first principles with their own justification, and as such do not derive their justification from one's belief that perception is reliable. Since the perceptual beliefs are justified independently of the belief that perception is reliable, it is not viciously circular to inductively infer from them that perception is reliable, thereby boosting the justification of this first principle.

These reflections on epistemic circularity show that even if philosophers such as McDermid are correct that "whenever we try to validate any of our basic cognitive faculties, we cannot avoid presupposing the truth of what we are trying to prove," such philosophers are mistaken in their conclusion: "Consequently, we cannot rationally

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[58] Alston, "Epistemic Circularity," 30.

[59] Or at least, these perceptual beliefs are not based entirely on the belief that perception is reliable. So long as they are first principles with foundational justification, it would be fine if their justification was boosted based on an inference from one's belief that perception is reliable. The epistemically circular argument would still be legitimate on foundationalism: all justification is generated and transmitted in the right ways.

justify our faith in the reliability of our cognitive faculties—something to which Reid explicitly called attention."[60] Even if an argument for the reliability of a faculty presupposes the reliability of that faculty, this does not prevent such an argument from rationally justifying our faith in that faculty. As we will see, Reid did not deny the possibility of such arguments, and he actually provides a number of them himself.

The purported philosophical grounds for the No Justification Boosting Thesis are unsatisfactory. Moreover, as we have seen, it is possible to boost the justification of first principles. For instance, suppose it is a perceptual first principle that there is a swan in front of me. I might then hear the person beside me say that there is a swan in front of us, recall that she is a professional birdwatcher and generally truthful, and conclude that there is indeed a swan in front of me. This first principle has acquired some inferential justification. So there are good philosophical reasons to reject the Boosting Thesis.[61]

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[60] McDermid, "Reid on Moral Liberty," 291.

[61] Here is another possible philosophical objection to my claim that the justification of first principles can be boosted. The objection is that there is a maximum justification a belief can enjoy, and first principles typically enjoy this maximum justification. Hence, since first principles are maximally justified, their justification cannot be boosted. In response, it may be correct that psychologically humans are capable of only a certain degree of certainty or strength of belief. If one is psychologically maximally certain, then obviously one cannot be more certain. However, this does not mean that one cannot receive additional justification for one's belief. Additional justification does not have to make a subjective, psychological difference in the strength and certainty of one's belief. I propose that justification should be understood in a conditional sense: If one receives justification for the belief that *p*, then *if* one is not certain that *p*, that justification can and should increase one's strength of belief that *p* in proportion to the amount of justification, or until one is certain, whichever comes first. Here is an example of how such a conditional account of justification might work. Suppose I am certain of a self-evident first principle. I then acquire additional, inferential justification for this principle. My justification for this principle is boosted even though it does not make a subjective, psychological difference in my belief. I then encounter an undercutting defeater for accepting the principle as a first principle. *If* I did not have additional justification for the principle, I should now cease believing it. But I do have additional justification, and this justification now makes a subjective, psychological difference in my belief of the principle. I should continue to believe the principle based on the additional justification. And if the additional justification is strong enough, it may even be the case that I should continue to be certain of the principle. What I have here said regarding justification could also be said regarding evidence. If, like Patrick Rysiew, one interprets Reidian evidence psychologically as that which makes something evident, or apparent, then at some point a truth will be maximally evident. However, this does not prevent one from acquiring further evidence for that truth. While such further evidence may not actually make the truth psychologically more

2.3. Textual Considerations

Several passages in Reid's work seem to provide incontestable evidence that Reid endorsed the No Justification Boosting Thesis. Rysiew and Harris have both noted Reid's statement that "it is contrary to the nature of first principles to admit of direct or *apodictical* proof."[62] Baumann points to a passage where Reid claims first principles "need no proof, and . . . do not admit of direct proof."[63] And I have found several additional passages where Reid denies the possibility of direct arguments for first principles.[64]

I will argue shortly that Reid's more nuanced opinion is not represented in those passages that deny first principles admit of direct proof. But first, what follows from the denial that first principles admit of *direct* proof? As we have seen, scholars such as Rysiew and de Bary claim that when Reid allows for indirect but not direct arguments for first principles, he is allowing that we can argue that a principle is a first principle, but not that it is true. These scholars misunderstand what Reid means by direct and indirect arguments. In a key passage Reid writes,

> It may be observed, that although it is contrary to the nature of first principles to admit of direct or *apodictical* proof; yet there are certain ways of reasoning even about them, by which those that are just and solid may be confirmed, and those

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evident, it would *if* one lost some of one's original evidence. Reid does sometimes speak of maxim degrees of evidence (see, for example, *IP*, VII.iii). When he does so, I believe he should be understood as speaking about maximum degrees of evident-ness, which is a psychological matter. Even if something is maximally evident, one can still acquire additional evidence for it, and this additional evidence boosts one's justification. And if one loses some of one's original evidence, this additional evidence will increase the psychological evident-ness of the truth.

[62] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 463; see Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," 444, and Harris, "On Reid's 'Inconsistent Triad'," 122. I take Reid to generally be using "proof" in the loose sense of "argument." Hence, providing an inductive argument for the truth of a first principle contradicts the claim that there cannot be proofs for first principles.

[63] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 39; see Baumann, "The Scottish Pragmatist?" 49.

[64] See, for example, Reid, *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 147; Reid, *IP*, II.x, 141; VI.iv, 467.

> that are false may be detected. It may here be proper to mention some of the topics from which we may reason in matters of this kind.[65]

Reid proceeds to discuss five different types of indirect arguments for first principles. According to Rysiew, "[T]hese are strategies for defending first principles as first principles, and are not intended as arguments for their truth."[66] In relation to this passage, de Bary similarly writes, "But we have, surely, to take Reid here as saying that the 'justness' and 'solidity', or the 'falsity' in question relates only to the status of principles *as genuine first principles*, not to the objective truth or falsity of what they lay down."[67]

I do not deny that Reid thinks at least some of these five types of indirect arguments are useful for showing that a principle is a first principle. But I deny this is *all* that these arguments are concerned with. We should not so quickly dismiss Reid's statement that these are arguments for confirming justness and solidity and detecting falsehood. Regarding the second type of argument, Reid writes,

> *Secondly*, A first principle may admit of a proof *ad absurdum*.
> In this kind of proof, which is very common in mathematics, we suppose the contradictory proposition to be true. We trace the consequences of that supposition in a train of reasoning; and if we find any of its necessary consequences to be manifestly absurd, we conclude the supposition from which it followed to be false; and therefore its contradictory to be true.[68]

Pace Rysiew and de Bary, surely such *ad absurdum* proofs are concerned with truth! In Reid's discussions of the next two types of indirect arguments and in his concluding summary, Reid further indicates that he is concerned with the truth of first principles, and

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[65] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 463.

[66] Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," 445; for a similar claim, see Greco, "How to Reid Moore," 559, 559 footnote 16.

[67] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 132. Emphasis in the original.

[68] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 463.

not merely with whether they are *first* principles.[69] In response to Rysiew and de Bary, it should further be noted that when Reid distinguishes between direct and indirect demonstrations, he does not distinguish them based on their strength or on whether they attempt to prove that a principle is true:[70]

> They have all equal strength. The direct demonstration is preferred where it can be had, for this reason only, as I apprehend, because it is the shortest road to the conclusion. The nature of the evidence and its strength is the same in all: Only we are conducted to it by different roads.[71]

In summary, even if it were Reid's opinion that first principles do not admit of direct proofs, this would not be evidence that he endorsed the Boosting Thesis. Indirect proofs can be used to infer the truth of a first principle and boost its justification.

But in other passages Reid denies that first principles admit of *any* proofs.[72] Rysiew quotes Reid's claim that first principles, "being self-evident, do not admit of

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[69] Regarding the third type of indirect argument—an appeal to the authoritative agreement of humankind on some matter—Reid responds to the following objection: "Here perhaps it will be said, What has authority to do in matters of opinion? Is *truth* to be determined by most votes?" (emphasis added). A few paragraphs later he writes, "Such a judgment can be *erroneous* only when there is some cause of the error, as general as the error is: When this can be shewn to be the case, I acknowledge it ought to have its due weight. But to suppose a general deviation from *truth* among mankind in things self-evident, of which no cause can be assigned, is highly unreasonable" (emphases added). Regarding the fourth type of argument, Reid comments that it shows a principle "cannot be the effect of education, or of *false* reasoning" (emphasis added). Finally, in his concluding summary Reid writes that "there are ways of reasoning, with regard to first principles, by which those that are truly such may be distinguished from vulgar *errors* or prejudices" (emphasis added; *IP*, VI.iv, 464-467).

[70] Admittedly, most arguments for first principles will not be demonstrations, at least in the sense Reid understands that term (see *IP*, VII.i, 544-545). Nonetheless, Reid's discussion of direct versus indirect demonstrations suggests how we should understand his more general distinction between direct and indirect arguments.

[71] Reid, *IP*, VII.i, 547.

[72] Once again, I understand Reid as usually using "proof" in a sense synonymous with "argument."

proof."[73] De Bary identifies additional passages which purportedly support the claim that Reid accepted the Boosting Thesis.[74] And I have found yet other passages to this effect.[75]

Unfortunately for the claim that Reid endorsed the Boosting Thesis, Reid is not always very accurate in his statements, and he not infrequently overstates his point. This is especially the case when he is excitedly responding to skeptics, which he does quite frequently. While such overstatements may be mere carelessness on Reid's part, it is also possible that he is purposefully overstating his point for rhetorical and polemical purposes.[76] At any rate, it is necessary to consider numerous passages when trying to determine Reid's more nuanced opinion. A more thorough examination of Reid's writings reveals that he thinks we *can* argue, directly and otherwise, for the truth of first principles, and that he himself provides arguments for the truth of a number of first principles.

In the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid notes that first principles "*seldom* admit of direct proof, nor do they need it."[77] The point Reid wants to emphasize in response to the skeptic is that first principles do not *need* proofs for us to know them in normal situations. They may admit of proofs, sometimes even direct proofs, but they don't need them. They have basic justification, and this is generally sufficient. But Reid sometimes overstates his position. For instance, only three paragraphs before noting that first

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[73] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 41; Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," 444.

[74] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 130–131. Incidentally, I think that, when properly interpreted, *none* of de Bary's passages provide good support for the Boosting Thesis.

[75] See, for example, Reid, *IP*, VI.vi, 496; VI.vii, 522; Reid, *AP*, III.pt 3.vi, 178.

[76] I thank Gregory Thornbury for suggesting this possibility when I presented this section of my dissertation at the Baptist Association of Philosophy Teachers Conference (October 5, 2012, Union University, Jackson, Tennessee).

[77] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 39.

principles "seldom admit of direct proof," we find the previously mentioned passage that Reid scholars have cited in support of the Boosting Thesis: first principles are principles "which need no proof, and which do not admit of direct proof." Reid's more nuanced position is that first principles *seldom* admit of direct proofs, but they sometimes do, although, being first principles, they do not *need* external evidence for us to know them, at least in most contexts (e.g., absent an undefeated defeater). Later in the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid notes a property that is common among "first principles, and which can hardly be found in any principle that is built *solely* upon reasoning."[78] Reid understands first principles, not as principles that *are not* or *cannot* be "built upon reasoning" (i.e., argued for), but as principles that are not "built *solely* upon reasoning." Reid makes some similar comments in the *Active Powers*:

> I call these *first principles*, because they appear to me to have in themselves an intuitive evidence which I cannot resist. I find I can express them in other words. I can illustrate them by examples and authorities, and *perhaps can deduce one of them from another*; but I am not able to deduce them from other principles that are more evident.[79]

Reid is aware that (at least some) first principles can receive some additional, non-basic justification via arguments for their truth.

That Reid rejects the Boosting Thesis is further confirmed by the fact that at various places in his writings he gives arguments for the truth of first principles.[80,81] As I

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[78] Ibid., VI.v, 482. Emphasis added.

[79] Reid, *AP*, V.i, 276. Emphasis added.

[80] It is, of course, possible that Reid is inconsistent and mistaken in giving arguments for first principles. But these arguments provide good evidence against the Boosting Thesis, and when considered in conjunction with the above considerations, I believe they help provide a collectively decisive case against the Boosting Thesis. Additionally, by adhering to the principle of ascribing minimal inconsistencies to an author, we should take Reid's arguments for first principles and the above direct rejections of the Boosting Thesis as Reid's considered opinion. The alternative is to claim that the Boosting Thesis represents Reid's considered opinion, and that he is mistaken in *both* his claims that we can provide

have shown, the Boosting Thesis is inconsistent with not only direct arguments for first principles, but also with indirect arguments.[82] In the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid lists a number of contingent self-evident first principles. The eighth of these is, "That there is life and intelligence in our fellow-men with whom we converse."[83] As a first principle, this is something we justifiedly believe without reasoning about it, and even without being able to give a reason for it.[84] Reid nonetheless proceeds to give an argument for the truth of this principle: "Setting aside this natural conviction, I believe the best reason we can give, to prove that other men are living and intelligent, is, that their words and actions indicate like powers of understanding as we are conscious of in ourselves."[85] In his discussion of the twelfth contingent first principle—"That, in the phaenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar circumstances"—Reid similarly notes, "This is one of those principles, which, when we grow up and observe the

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arguments for the truth of first principles and in providing numerous arguments for first principles. This alternative also requires attributing to Reid a fallacious claim, for as we have seen, the Boosting Thesis is false.

[81] De Bary has noted the apparent conflict between Reid's "official" position and his practice of sometimes apparently giving arguments for the truth of first principles. See de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 130.

[82] Or more precisely, the Boosting Thesis is inconsistent with *many* of Reid's indirect arguments for first principles. I allow that Reid sometimes gives "indirect arguments" for first principles which are really only arguments for their status as *first* principles. However, even these arguments are plausibly understood as arguments for the *truth* of the first principle in question. This is because Reid holds that first principles—things that our constitution non-inferentially determines us to believe—are generally *true*. So if something is a first principle, then it is probably true. See footnote 31.

[83] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 482.

[84] Reid writes, "No man thinks of asking himself what reason he has to believe that his neighbour is a living creature. He would be not a little surprised if another person should ask him so absurd a question; and perhaps could not give any reason which would not equally prove a watch or a puppet to be a living creature" (*IP*, VI.v, 483).

[85] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 483. In the previous chapter, Reid similarly writes, "Opinions that appear so early in the minds of men, that they cannot be the effect of education, or of false reasoning, have a good claim to be considered as first principles. Thus the belief we have, that the persons about us are living and intelligent beings, is a belief for which perhaps we can give some reason, when we are able to reason; but we had this belief before we could reason, and before we could learn it by instruction. It seems therefore to be an immediate effect of our constitution" (ibid., VI.iv, 467).

course of nature, we can confirm by reasoning."[86] In the *Inquiry*, Reid likewise writes that though reasoning "did not give rise to this belief," it is nonetheless possible for reasoning to "confirm our belief of the continuance of the present course of nature."[87]

Not only does Reid give arguments for the truth of various first principles, but at several places he gives epistemically circular track-record arguments for first principles concerned with the veridical nature of our faculties.[88] Reid gives track-record arguments for at least induction, perception, testimony, and memory.[89] I will focus on the argument for memory, which supplies a particularly clear example. Regarding memory, Reid writes,

> Perhaps it may be said, that the experience we have had of the fidelity of memory is a good reason for relying upon its testimony. I deny not that this may be a reason to those who have had this experience, and who reflect upon it. But I believe there are few who ever thought of this reason, or who found any need of it. It must be some very rare occasion that leads a man to have recourse to it; and in those who have done so, the testimony of memory was believed before the

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[86] Ibid., VI.v, 489.

[87] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 196.

[88] The conclusion of Reid's track-record arguments is to the effect that they "confirm" the principle in question (e.g., *IP*, VI.v, 489). As de Bary notes, this raises a key question: In what sense do they "confirm" the principle? De Bary claims that this word and similar ones are ambiguous between (a) putting a belief beyond all reasonable doubt, as by a sound argument; (b) providing added support for considering a belief true; and (c) encouraging a merely psychological firmness of belief without any concern for the truth of the belief (*Reid and Scepticism*, 156). De Bary attempts to interpret some passages according to (c), but finds himself unable to do so with others. For my argument, (a) and/or (b) are needed. I want to argue that for Reid track-record arguments can give one some justification for considering a belief true. It does not matter whether such arguments (a) justify the belief beyond a reasonable doubt, or whether they merely (b) provide some added justification for the belief. They must not, however, merely (c) encourage psychological certainty without boosting the justification of the belief.

[89] Reid gives track-record arguments for perception (*Inquiry*, VI.xx, 170), testimony (ibid., VI.xx, 170-171), memory (*IP*, III.ii, 256), and induction (ibid., VI.v, 489). In an endnote, Loeb correctly notes that "Reid allows that an argument for a benevolent God . . . , or an inductive argument based on induction's 'track record' . . . , can enhance the standing of inductive inference" (Loeb, "The Naturalisms of Hume and Reid," 84 note 8).

> experience of its fidelity, and that belief could not be caused by the experience which came after it.[90]

This argument for trusting memory is based on our past experience of its fidelity. Upon reflection, we *remember* that *memory* has generally been reliable, and conclude that we are justified in relying upon its testimony.

Note carefully exactly what Reid says about this argument. First, "the testimony of memory was believed before the experience of its fidelity." That memory is veridical is a principle of common sense.[91] As such, it is something we can justifiedly believe on externalist grounds, prior to any experience of its "fidelity." Second, the original justification of this first principle is adequate for most, but not all, epistemic situations: "there are few who ever thought of this reason, or who found any need of it. It must be some very rare occasion that leads a man to have recourse to it." Third, such epistemically circular reasoning gives one a legitimate reason for trusting memory: "I deny not that this may be a reason to those who have had this experience, and who reflect upon it." Fourth, this circular reasoning merely supplements one's original justification in trusting memory; it need not supplant or replace one's original justification.[92]

For Reid, such circular reasoning does not and cannot get one epistemically off the ground.[93] But once one is epistemically off the ground on externalist grounds, such circular reasoning can give one some *further* justification for trusting one's faculties. In most situations, such further justification is not necessary for knowledge; it makes one's

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[90] Reid, *IP*, III.ii, 256.

[91] Ibid., VI.v, 474.

[92] As previously mentioned, however, arguments for the truth of a first principle may tempt one to reject it as a first principle and to accept it solely on the basis of arguments.

[93] This is clearest in Reid's discussion of Descartes's circle, which I consider below.

belief super-justified. But such justification may be important or necessary for knowledge in certain situations. For instance, perhaps I have a partial defeater for my belief that memory is veridical. As a result, this belief no longer has sufficient justification to count as knowledge. In this situation, epistemically circular reasoning might supply the additional justification needed for my belief to regain the status of knowledge. Moreover, such epistemically circular reasoning also gives one a reason for trusting one's faculties. In chapter 7 I will return to the value of being able to give a reason for a belief.

Throughout his writings, Reid gives arguments, including epistemically circular arguments, for the truth of various first principles.[94] This provides further evidence that Reid rejected the No Justification Boosting Thesis.

I have shown that the purported philosophical grounds for the No Justification Boosting Thesis are unsatisfactory, and that there are good philosophical reasons to reject it. I have further shown that while some isolated passages suggest Reid accepts the Boosting Thesis, a more extensive and careful examination of the Reidian corpus reveals that this is not Reid's nuanced opinion. According to Reid, we do not normally *need* arguments to be justified in accepting first principles, and therefore it is unreasonable *to demand* proofs for them.[95] But Reid does not think it is unreasonable or impossible to give arguments for first principles, and he himself gives a number of such arguments.

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[94] These examples are by no means exhaustive. For an argument that our senses are generally reliable, see *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 170. In the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid clearly states that this is a first principle: "Another first principle is, That those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be" (*IP*, VI.v, 476). In the *Inquiry* Reid also indicates that while the reliability of testimony is a first principle, it can be confirmed by "reflection" (*Inquiry*, VI.xx, 170-171).

[95] De Bary misunderstands one of Reid's claims to this effect and misinterprets it as supporting the Boosting Thesis. Reid writes, "[I]t is unreasonable to require demonstration [i.e., deductive reasoning from necessary truths; see *IP*, VII.i, 544-545] for things which do not admit of it. It is no less unreasonable to require reasoning of any kind for things which are known without reasoning" (*IP*, VII.iii, 556). De Bary comments, "To paraphrase and amplify: there is nothing more unreasonable than to ask the impossible"—

2.4. The Epistemic Dangers of Arguing for First Principles

Reid does, however, see some epistemic dangers in giving arguments, or at least direct arguments, for first principles. His misgivings concerning such arguments may partially explain those passages where Reid overstates his position by denying the possibility of arguments for first principles. In the *Active Powers*, Reid writes,

> What I would here observe is, That as first principles differ from deductions of reasoning in the nature of their evidence, and must be tried by a different standard when they are called in question, it is of importance to know to which of these two classes a truth which we would examine, belongs. When they are not distinguished, men are apt to demand proof for every thing they think fit to deny: And when we attempt to prove by direct argument, what is really self-evident, the reasoning will always be inconclusive; for it will either take for granted the thing to be proved, or something not more evident; and so, instead of giving strength to the conclusion, will rather tempt those to doubt of it, who never did so before.[96]

When giving an argument for a first principle, there is a danger that people will come to demand an argument for that principle. They will no longer accept it as a first principle with basic justification, but rather simply because of reasoning which supplies external evidence for its truth. But such reasoning will always be inconclusive. It will either presuppose the truth of what it attempts to establish, or else it will be based on premises that are not more evident than what it is attempting to establish. Moreover, since the reasoning from other principles will almost certainly be inductive rather than deductive, the conclusion will probably be less evident than the truths upon which it is based. So if one comes to accept a first principle simply or primarily on the basis of reasoning, it will

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that is, to ask for an argument for the truth of a first principle (*Reid and Scepticism*, 133). Reid's point, however, is not that it is unreasonable to *ask* for such an argument (because such an argument is impossible). The point is that it is unreasonable to "*require*" reasoning for first principles (because they are known without reasoning and do not need reasoning to be justified). It is unreasonable to require that which is neither necessary nor needed.

[96] Reid, *AP*, V.i, 270. In *IP*, Reid similarly writes, "When men attempt to deduce such self-evident principles from others more evident, they always fall into inconclusive reasoning: And the consequence of this has been, that others, such as Berkeley and Hume, finding the arguments brought to prove such first principles to be weak and inconclusive, have been tempted first to doubt of them, and afterwards to deny them" (*IP*, I.ii, 41). See also Reid, *Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 172.

appear less evident than if one had never seen an argument for it. As a result of a good argument for a first principle, one may end up in an epistemically worse position.

This does not, however, indicate a problem with such arguments per se, nor does it mean they do not have legitimate and important epistemic functions. For instance, if someone has a defeater for a first principle, such an argument might boost the principle's justification and return it to the status of knowledge. But these considerations do mean that arguments for first principles present an epistemic temptation and must be handled with care. One must distinguish first principles from derived principles, and recognize that these are arguments for what does not normally need argumentation. Furthermore, it may be prudent not to provide arguments for a first principle to those who have no need for them, lest those arguments "tempt those to doubt of it, who never did so before."[97]

The No Justification Boosting Thesis is false, and Reid does not accept it. Despite some passages to contrary, Reid can and does allow for arguments to boost the justification of first principles, and he provides a number of such arguments. He does, however, think that such arguments can present an epistemic temptation and should therefore be handled with care.[98]

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[97] It is interesting to speculate whether Reid has fallen prey to this danger regarding belief in God. Why does he not think belief in God is properly basic? Perhaps he has been led astray by good arguments for God's existence.

[98] I presented an earlier version of the material in section 2 at the Pacific Meeting of the American Philosophical Association on March 29, 2013, and the current version has benefited from the comments of James Van Cleve, who was the commentator for my paper. I also presented an early version of this material at the Biennial Meeting of the Baptist Association of Philosophy Teachers on October 5, 2012, and benefitted from the helpful audience questions and comments.

3. Theistic Arguments for First Principles

Reid provides theistic arguments for the truth of various first principles. Even on the standard foundationalist interpretation of his epistemology, many of these arguments are philosophically respectable. They are not viciously circular, and they boost the justification of the principle in question.

3.1. Noncircular Theistic Arguments for First Principles

Some of Reid's theistic arguments for first principles do not involve any circularity. For instance, one of Reid's principles of common sense is, "That, in the phaenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar circumstances."[99] Reid acknowledges this is a contingent truth; it "has [not] that kind of intuitive evidence which mathematical axioms have. It is not a necessary truth." It is nonetheless a self-evident first principle for epistemically competent adults who have contemplated it: "This is what every man assents to as soon as he understands it, and no man asks a reason for it. It has therefore the most genuine marks of a first principle."[100] As a first principle, it is justifiably believed in normal circumstances, so long as Reid's four externalist conditions are met. This principle does not normally need additional justification. Nonetheless, its justification can be boosted through a theistic inference:

> Indeed, if we believe that there is a wise and good Author of nature, we may see a good reason, why he should continue the same laws of nature, and the same connections of things, for a long time: because, if he did otherwise, we could learn nothing from what is past, and all our experience would be of no use to us.

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[99] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 489.

[100] Ibid., VI.v, 490.

> . . . [T]his consideration, when we come to the use of reason, may confirm our belief of the continuance of the present course of nature.[101]

Our belief in "a wise and good Author of nature" need not presuppose the principle in question. Nor need our inference from theism to this principle presuppose the principle. For Reid, theism can and does boost the justification of some first principles, and in a manner perfectly acceptable even on the standard foundationalist interpretation.

Theism can also boost the justification of first principles concerned with the veridical nature of a particular faculty. Earlier I gave the following example of a noncircular argument for the veridicality of a basic source of knowledge:

> A, B, and C are basic sources of knowledge. A and B supply justified beliefs *a* and *b*. Faculty A, inferring from *a* and *b*, provides justification for the belief that C is trustworthy.

There are fleshed-out versions of this argument in which theism plays a central role in boosting our justification for thinking C is trustworthy. For example, one might use reason, memory, consciousness, and the external senses to reason to God's existence. From God's existence one might then use the same faculties to infer that conscience is veridical, thereby boosting one's justification for thinking conscience is veridical. This argument does not presuppose that conscience is veridical, and it is legitimate even on simple foundationalism. This shows that even given the standard interpretation of Reid as a simple foundationalist, it is possible for theism to boost the justification of some first principles concerned with the veridicality of a particular faculty, and to do so without circularity.

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[101] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 196.

3.2. Epistemically Circular Theistic Arguments for First Principles

Theism cannot, however, provide noncircular arguments for certain basic sources of knowledge. For example, giving and understanding any argument will involve *reason*, so there cannot be noncircular inferential justification for trusting reason. Any argument, including a theistic one, that our faculties taken as a unit are veridical will also necessarily rely on some of the faculties whose reliability it is attempting to establish, and therefore involve some circularity. However, such circular arguments for the reliability of reason or our faculties taken as a unit need not be viciously circular. They may be only epistemically circular. Hence, even on the standard foundationalist interpretation of Reid's epistemology, theism can both boost our justification for thinking that any given faculty is veridical, and can boost our justification for thinking that our faculties taken as a unit are veridical. Indeed, theism not only can but does play such a role in Reid's epistemology.[102]

For instance, according to Reid, "The genuine dictate of our natural faculties is the voice of God, no less than what he reveals from heaven; and to say that it is fallacious is to impute a lie to the God of truth."[103] Reid here gives a reason to think that the genuine dictates of our natural faculties are true. They are true because they are "the voice of . . . the God of truth." Reid elsewhere similarly writes,

> Our intellectual powers are wisely fitted by the Author of our nature for the discovery of truth, as far as suits our present estate. Error is not their natural issue,

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[102] Wolterstorff has also noted that Reid gives epistemically circular theistic arguments. See Wolterstorff, *Reid*, 211–212; Wolterstorff, "Hume and Reid," 414–415.

[103] Reid, *AP*, IV.vi, 229.

> any more than disease is of the natural structure of the body. . . . The understanding, in its natural and best state, pays its homage to truth only.[104]

Once again, theism supplies a reason to think that the understanding, or intellect, "pays its homage to truth only." Both of these passages appeal to theism as a reason to believe that our doxastic faculties, taken as a unit, are veridical.

The reasoning behind both passages is epistemically circular. It is only through the exercise of our faculties that we come to believe in the existence and truthfulness of God. And it is only through the exercise of our faculties that we infer from their being created by God to their being veridical. But only if our faculties are, in fact, veridical can we know the premises from which we infer that our faculties are veridical. Reid has given us an epistemically circular reason to think that our faculties are veridical, but such epistemic circularity is not problematic. Even on the standard foundationalist interpretation of Reid, theism can and does provide justification for thinking that our faculties are veridical. If we already believe our faculties are veridical as a self-evident principle of common sense, theism can still boost the justification of this first principle through epistemically circular reasoning.

3.3. Why Reid's Epistemically Circular Arguments Are Virtuous but Descartes's Are Vicious

Reid criticizes Descartes for circularly reasoning from God's existence to the reliability of the faculties he uses to arrive at God's existence. I do not endorse Reid's interpretation of Descartes, and in chapter 7 I suggest that Reid and Descartes are actually doing something rather similar through their epistemically circular theistic reasoning. However, setting aside issues of Descartes scholarship, Reid's criticisms of Descartes

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[104] Reid, *IP*, VI.viii, 527–528.

raise an apparent problem for my interpretation of Reid. It might reasonably be objected that Reid criticizes Descartes for just the sort of circularity I have argued Reid accepts and employs. Thus, Reid does not accept epistemically circular arguments, or at least not theistic ones, and if he does employ them it is by mistake. Or perhaps Reid is deeply confused and inconsistent regarding epistemic circularity. In response to such an objection, it is important to show how Reid's circle differs from Descartes's (as interpreted by Reid), allowing Reid's circle to be virtuous while Descartes's is vicious.

According to Reid, Descartes attempts to withhold assent to the deliverances of his faculties until he proves they are veridical. Descartes then attempts to get epistemically off the ground by using circular theistic arguments to prove that at least some of his faculties are veridical. Reid's key critique of Descartes comes within Reid's discussion of the seventh contingent first principle: "[T]he natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious." The passage is important, and I will quote it at length. Reid writes,

> If any man should *demand* a proof of this [principle], it is impossible to satisfy him. For suppose it should be mathematically demonstrated, this would signify nothing in this case; because, to judge of a demonstration, a man must trust his faculties, and take for granted the very thing in question. . . .
>
> If a Sceptic should build his scepticism upon *this* foundation, that all our reasoning and judging powers *are fallacious in their nature*, or should resolve at least to *with-hold assent* until it be proved that they are not; it would be impossible by argument to beat him out of *this* strong hold, and he must even be left to enjoy his scepticism.
>
> Des Cartes certainly made a false step in this matter; for having suggested this doubt among others, that whatever evidence he might have from his consciousness, his senses, his memory, or his reason; yet possibly some malignant being had given him those faculties on purpose to impose upon him; and therefore, that they *are not to be trusted without a proper voucher*: To remove *this doubt*, he endeavours to prove the being of a Deity who is no deceiver; whence he concludes, that the faculties he had given him are true and worthy to be trusted.
>
> It is strange that so acute a reasoner did not perceive, that in this reasoning there is evidently a begging of the question.

> For if our faculties *be fallacious*; why may they not deceive us in this reasoning as well as in others? And if they are to be trusted in this instance without a voucher, why not in others?[105]

Descartes's argument is epistemically circular. It takes for granted the reliability of our faculties in attempting to establish that they are reliable. Significantly, Reid does not criticize such epistemically circular reasoning itself, but only Descartes's use of it. The problem is not the reasoning but employing it in a skeptical context. Reid's critique of epistemically circular reasoning is aimed at radical skeptics, those who "demand" a proof that their faculties are not fallacious, who "withhold assent" until they receive such a proof, who think their faculties "are not to be trusted without a proper voucher." For such skeptics, an argument that takes for granted that our faculties are veridical is *ipso facto* viciously circular. This is because the argument takes for granted what is doubted or even denied. Descartes's circular reasoning problematically begs the question because the reliability of his faculties is in question.[106] If Descartes were merely looking for evidence that his faculties are reliable, then it would not be problematic if his reasoning took for granted what it attempts to confirm. But since Descartes begins by *doubting* that his faculties are veridical, he cannot legitimately engage in reasoning that takes for granted the veridical nature of those faculties. As Reid comments elsewhere, "[W]hat can be more absurd than to attempt to convince a man by reasoning who *disowns* the authority

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[105] Ibid., VI.v, 480–481. Emphases added.

[106] Many passages that seem incompatible with my claim that Reid accepts epistemically circular arguments can be read as denying the possibility of providing a proof of the sort Descartes attempted. For instance, in the following passage, "prove" can be read in the strong sense of an indubitable proof: "The faculties which nature hath given us, are the only engines we can use to find out the truth. We cannot indeed *prove* that those faculties are not fallacious, unless God should give us new faculties to sit in judgment upon the old. But we are born under a necessity of trusting them" (Reid, *AP*, III.pt 3.vi, 179–180, emphasis added).

of reason"?[107] If one begins from a position of doubt, then epistemically circular reasoning is irrational and viciously circular. As Alston comments, "[A]n epistemically circular argument . . . cannot be used to rationally move a person from a condition of not accepting the conclusion in any way, to a condition of doing so. For if the person does not already, at least practically, accept the conclusion he cannot be justified in accepting the premises."[108] And if he is not justified in accepting the premises, then he cannot be justified in concluding anything from them. In a skeptical context, epistemically circular reasoning is vicious. But Reid's epistemically circular reasoning does not occur in a skeptical context, and hence it is virtuous. It supplies justification for thinking that his faculties are veridical.

Reid's point is that one cannot get oneself epistemically off the ground; one cannot reason oneself into knowledge out of a justificatory vacuum. One must already be epistemically off the ground, and Reid thinks this is possible only via externalism, only if one is non-inferentially justified in believing the natural deliverances of one's faculties. Then, and only then, can one give reasons that justify trusting one's faculties. But these reasons only give further justification for what one was already justified in taking for granted, and they are not necessary for knowledge in most situations. For Reid, theism can strengthen and provide additional justification for all levels of the superstructure of knowledge, but the superstructure still requires a foundation. The foundation, however, is moderate and broad, unlike Descartes's. Reid denies that indubitable certainty is attainable, and he considers it too strenuous a demand for knowledge.

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[107] Reid, *IP*, VII.iv, 563. Emphasis added.

[108] Alston, "Epistemic Circularity," 15.

Even on the standard foundationalist interpretation, Reid can and does allow first principles to have their justification boosted. This is possible through both noncircular arguments and through epistemically circular arguments. Moreover, theism can and does boost the justification of various first principles, including first principles concerned with the veridical nature of our faculties. Even on the standard interpretation of Reid's epistemology, theism can and does play a significant justificatory role in relation to first principles.

CHAPTER SIX

Coherence, Theism, and Boosting the Justification of First Principles

In chapter 5 I assumed the standard foundationalist interpretation of Reid's epistemology. I showed that even on that interpretation theism can boost the justification of first principles, including first principles concerning the reliability of our faculties. In this chapter I show that Reid's epistemology is plausibly interpreted as containing coherentist strands and I consider how this further enables theism to boost the justification of first principles.

On simple foundationalism, a belief is justified because 1) it is properly basic, or 2) because it is properly founded on basic beliefs, or 3) because it is both properly basic and properly inferred from other basic beliefs, as I argued in chapter 5.[1] On simple foundationalism, arguments and inferences merely transmit basic justification; they do not generate justification. Epistemically circular arguments are permissible because they do not come full circle; the truth of the conclusion is a condition for knowledge of the premises, but the premises are justifiedly held independently of one's justification for believing the conclusion. Hence, such arguments can transmit justification to the conclusion. On simple foundationalism, if a belief is the conclusion of a genuinely circular argument, that belief does not receive any additional justification from the argument, for the transmitted justification just is that belief's justification. On simple

[1] The beliefs from which it is inferred might not be basic, but if they are not, they cannot be based on the basic belief that is being inferred from them. Such an inference would be circular.

foundationalism, the justification that comes out of a circle cannot be greater than the justification that goes into it. The circle, *qua* circle, is empty and worthless as regards justification; it merely transmits, but does not generate, justification. But for a coherentist, the circle *qua* circle is not necessarily worthless, but may be coherence-building. The coherence of the beliefs that form the circle, or perhaps one's awareness of such coherence, may generate some justification for all of them.

It is possible to describe coherence as a source of justification in terms acceptable on foundationalism. For instance, one might say it is a self-evident first principle that if one's beliefs cohere, then each of the beliefs in the cohering web is probably true, perhaps in relation to the level of coherence and the extensiveness of the web. So it is a first principle that if one's beliefs cohere, that gives one a (defeasible) reason to think that each of the cohering beliefs is true. From this first principle and one's awareness that some of one's beliefs cohere, one might infer that each of these cohering beliefs is probably true. Admittedly, this might boost one's justification for each of the beliefs only marginally, but nonetheless it can boost their justification, and each step can be accounted for in foundationalist terms. All justification is generated and transmitted in a foundationalist fashion: from the first principle that cohering beliefs are likely true and the independent, properly-founded belief that certain beliefs cohere, one infers that each of those cohering beliefs is likely true, thereby boosting their justification. Alternately, one could describe such a situation in the following externalist terms, which would be acceptable on foundationalism: if a properly-functioning human becomes aware that certain ones of his beliefs cohere, his justification for each of those beliefs non-inferentially increases in proportion to the level of coherence and the extensiveness of the

web of beliefs. Such a person's justification for each of the cohering beliefs increases because it is part of the truth-directed design plan of human cognitive faculties to believe more strongly beliefs that we see cohere. Hence, upon seeing that certain beliefs cohere, it is a first principle, justified on proper-functionalist grounds, that each of those beliefs is probably true.

Such descriptions could be used to understand in foundationalist terms what I am interpreting as coherentist strands in Reid's epistemology. Such descriptions blur a meaningful distinction between foundationalist and coherentist justification by making the truth of coherentism (assuming it contains a truth) a foundationalist first principle or part of the design plan of a properly-functioning human. My main concern here is to show that coherence boosts justification in Reid's epistemology. I am not concerned to establish that this phenomenon of coherence boosting one's justification cannot be interpreted in foundationalist terms. As the above two examples suggest, that is possible. My main point is that in Reid's epistemology awareness of one's beliefs cohering boosts the justification of those beliefs. Because this phenomenon is plausibly interpreted in coherentist terms, I will describe it as a coherentist strand in Reid's epistemology.

In section 1 I respond to two arguments regarding coherentism and Reid's epistemology. In section 2 I show that, independent of Reid's discussions of theism, there is reason to think his epistemology contains coherentist strands. This prepares the way for my argument in section 3 that theism, via coherence, boosts the justification of first principles. By arguing that Reid's epistemology contains coherentist strands, I do not wish to suggest that coherence is the only, the primary, or the initial source of justification in Reid's epistemology. By itself, the justification supplied by coherence is

not sufficient to justify a belief to the level required for knowledge, nor is it necessary for knowledge, at least in normal, non-skeptical contexts. I wish to argue merely that for Reid, the value of coherence is not simply the absence of defeaters—that is, the value of consistency. Coherence has positive epistemic value for Reid and can boost the justification of first principles.

1. Coherentism and Reid's Epistemology: Responses to Lehrer and de Bary

Most interpreters take Reid to be a simple foundationalist. Only a few have directly considered whether coherentism plays a role in Reid's epistemology. Keith Lehrer is the main advocate of the view that there are coherentist elements in Reid's epistemology. Philip de Bary is the main opponent of this view.

1.1. Keith Lehrer's Purported Evidence of Reid's Coherentism

I agree with Lehrer insofar as he claims there are coherentist elements in Reid's epistemology. However, Lehrer has inadequately supported this claim. While the passages he cites in support might be interpreted in coherentist terms, they are also readily and plausibly interpreted on simple foundationalist terms.

In a piece coauthored with John-Christian Smith, Lehrer uses the following passage from the *Intellectual Powers* to introduce the "coherentism" of Reid's epistemology[2]:

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[2] Daniel Schulthess has a response to an unpublished paper by Lehrer and Smith. This unpublished paper is presumably a version of the 1985 paper published in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. See Daniel Schulthess, "Did Reid Hold Coherentist Views?" in *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*, ed. Melvin Dalgarno and Eric Matthews (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 193–203. Schulthess fails to maintain a clear distinction between coherence and mere consistency, making his thesis unclear. However, he is obviously correct that "Reid is no 'coherentist' in the modern, strong sense" (200).

> Another first principle is, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious. If any man should demand a proof of this, it is impossible to satisfy him . . . ; because, to judge of a demonstration, a man must trust his faculties, and take for granted the very thing in question.[3]

In reference to this passage, Lehrer briefly comments, "These remarks . . . show that Reid's theory is a sophisticated combination of a foundation theory of knowledge with reliablism and a coherence theory."[4]

This is the entirety of Lehrer's discussion of the coherentism in this passage. This passage does not, however, "show" that Reid's epistemology contains coherentist elements. Reid is claiming that it is impossible to satisfy a skeptic who demands a proof for the veridicality of our faculties before he trusts them. The reason this demand is impossible to satisfy is that for the skeptic to follow any argument, he "must trust his faculties, and take for granted the very thing in question." This passage makes perfect sense on simple foundationalism: All beliefs are justified either because they are properly basic or inferred from properly basic beliefs. The skeptic in question refuses to accept the veridicality of our faculties without a proof. Hence, he cannot rationally accept any first principle, for all presuppose the veridicality of our faculties, and this is in question. Finally, without any first principles, the skeptic cannot accept any argument for the veridicality of our faculties. Not only does the passage fail to "show" the coherentism in Reid's epistemology, but without further explanation, it seems to *deny* the legitimacy of coherentist justification. This is because on coherentism an argument that "takes for granted the very thing in question" is not *ipso facto* defective. Indeed, coherence-building arguments can take for granted what is being supported. Yet in the above passage the

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[3] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 480.

[4] Lehrer and Smith, "Reid on Testimony and Perception," 35.

reason it is impossible to satisfy the person who demands the proof is that any proof would "take for granted the very thing in question," implying that such taking-for-granted is unacceptable.[5]

Lehrer proceeds to give an argument in support of the thesis that Reid's "epistemology . . . combines elements of reliability, first principles, and coherence as the ingredients of human knowledge."[6] I find Lehrer's presentation of the argument unclear, but he has presented clearer versions of it in two subsequent publications.[7] In what follows I will draw from all three of Lehrer's presentations of the argument.

Lehrer begins with Reid's seventh first principle of contingent truths: "That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious." He frequently calls this principle "the first first principle," or alternately "the looping principle."[8] According to Lehrer, we can use our (reliable) faculties and the inductive principle (another first principle) to discover laws of nature. "But," Lehrer notes, "these laws of nature include the laws of *our* nature, and therefore, we may discover that the testimony of our faculties . . . is a trustworthy guide to truth."[9] Since the first first principle is something to which our faculties testify, it too is "confirmed by the

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[5] I interpret this passage in detail and in context in chapter 5, section 3.3. Lehrer might claim that such taking-for-granted is only unacceptable to the skeptic, and that Reid is not endorsing this criticism of taking-for-granted. I do not see any support for this reading of the passage. Reid seems to think that for the skeptic in question, an argument that takes for granted the thing in question is thereby defective.

[6] Lehrer and Smith, "Reid on Testimony and Perception," 22.

[7] Keith Lehrer, "Chisholm, Reid and the Problem of the Epistemic Surd," *Philosophical Studies* 60 (1990): 39–45; Keith Lehrer, "Evidentialism and the Paradox of Parity," in *Evidentialism and Its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55–68.

[8] For simplicity, I will adopt Lehrer's terminology for the seventh first principle of contingent truths. This does not, however, imply that I adopt Lehrer's understanding of the principle or that I think Lehrer correctly understands the role of this principle in Reid's epistemology.

[9] Lehrer and Smith, "Reid on Testimony and Perception," 36; see also 37.

application of the other principles. This sounds just like Reid is a coherence theorist." Lehrer concludes that Reid has a hybrid position: while according to Reid "some beliefs are evident without reasoning or inference," "Reid is not a simple foundationalist," for the mutual confirmation of first principles is coherentist.[10] In his most recent and perhaps clearest statement on this matter, Lehrer writes,

> The first principles confirm each other including the first first principle, he [i.e., Reid] insists, and remarks that the first principles hang together like links in a chain.[11] One who lifts one link must be prepared to lift the rest. The doctrine of mutual support between a set of principles is a coherentist conception.[12]

Lehrer moves to coherentism too quickly. He has not revealed anything in Reid's epistemology that is not readily accounted for on simple foundationalism, and hence he has not shown that Reid's epistemology is best understood as a hybrid of foundationalism and coherentism. Lehrer's argument might be summarized as follows:

1) There is mutual support, or confirmation, between Reid's first principles.
2) "The doctrine of mutual support between a set of principles is a coherentist conception."
3) So, Reid's epistemology contains coherentist elements.

First, how are we to understand the "mutual support" in question? One kind of mutual support is coherentist: the coherence among beliefs generates some justification for each of them. But some mutual support is foundationalist. For instance, as considered in the previous chapter, first principles *a*, *b*, and *c* might provide inferential justification for first

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[10] Lehrer, "Chisholm, Reid and the Problem of the Epistemic Surd," 43.

[11] See Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 464. I discuss this passage below.

[12] Lehrer, "Evidentialism and the Paradox of Parity," 64. Given Lehrer's denial that in Reid's epistemology we can give arguments for the *truth* of first principles (see, for example, "Reid on Testimony and Perception"), I do not see how he can consistently hold that Reid allows for coherentist arguments for the truth of first principles. I will overlook this issue, however, since I have already shown that in Reid's epistemology there can be arguments for the truth of first principles.

principle *d*, and first principles *b*, *c*, and *d* might provide inferential justification for *a*. For Lehrer's argument to be sound, the second premise must be claiming that the mutual support in question is an exclusively coherentist conception: "The doctrine of mutual support between a set of principles is an *exclusively* coherentist conception." If it might also be a foundationalist conception, then the presence of such mutual support does not show that Reid's epistemology contains coherent elements. So the second premise is dealing with an exclusively coherentist conception of mutual support. For the argument to be valid, the first premise must be employing the same concept of support: There is mutual *coherentist* support between Reid's first principles.

But Lehrer has not yet shown there is mutual support that is not readily understood in foundationalist terms. He gives three main pieces of evidence that there is coherentist mutual support.

First, Lehrer appeals to the following passage from Reid:

> There is hardly any proposition, especially of those that may claim the character of first principles, that stands alone and unconnected. It draws many others along with it in a chain that cannot be broken. He that takes it up must bear the burden of all its consequences; and if that is too heavy for him to bear, he must not pretend to take it up.[13]

Lehrer claims Reid here tells us "first principles are connected like links in a chain, so that someone who cannot bear the weight of the whole should not attempt to pick up a part. It is clear that it is [the] looping principle that creates this effect."[14] It is not at all clear that it is the "looping principle" that creates this effect, and Reid does not even discuss the "looping principle" in the immediate context of this passage. Furthermore,

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[13] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 464.

[14] Lehrer, "Chisholm, Reid and the Problem of the Epistemic Surd," 43.

Reid's discussion of the chain metaphor does not suggest that the chain loops around on itself or forms a coherentist web; the image merely indicates connection among principles, and such connections need not be looping. Finally, there are plausible non-coherentist interpretations of this passage. For example, plausibly Reid's point is that all first principles stand on equal epistemic ground, and hence one cannot non-arbitrarily accept some and reject others. If one accepts one first principle, one must also accept all other first principles. As Reid writes in an often-quoted passage, "Why, Sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception; they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?"[15] By parity, we should count all our epistemic faculties as equally authoritative: "There is no more reason to account our senses fallacious, than our reason, our memory, or any other faculty of judging which Nature hath given us. . . . We are liable to error and wrong judgment in the use of them all; but as little in the informations of sense as in the deductions of reasoning."[16] It is because our faculties are equally authoritative that our first principles—that is, the immediate deliverances of our faculties—stand on equal epistemic ground. And because nearly all first principles have equal claim to our assent, "There is hardly any proposition, especially of those that may claim the character of first principles, that stands alone and unconnected. It draws many others along with it in a chain that cannot be broken. He that takes it up must bear the burden of all its consequences."

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[15] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 169.

[16] Reid, *IP*, II.xxii, 251–252.

Lehrer proceeds to give a second piece of evidence that in Reid's epistemology there is coherentist mutual support among first principles:

> [The looping principle] tells us that the faculties are not fallacious. . . . However, as Reid notes, the trustworthiness of our faculties is confirmed by experience. So the looping principle is also confirmed by the application of the other principles. This sounds just like Reid is a coherence theorist. So what is he?[17]

Lehrer proceeds to conclude that Reid holds a hybrid position combining elements of foundationalism and coherentism. This conclusion, I will argue, is correct. But has Lerher given good evidence for it? Lehrer is claiming that 1) the looping principle tells us that our faculties are trustworthy and hence other first principles are generally true, and 2) other first principles can tell us, through experience and reasoning, that our faculties are trustworthy. That is, other first principles can tell us the looping principle is true. This is clearly a case of mutual support: the looping principle supports other first principles, and some of these other first principles support the looping principle. This mutual support could be understood in coherentist terms. But it can also be readily interpreted in foundationalist terms, making it poor support for Lehrer's conclusion. As for 1) the looping principle telling us that our faculties are trustworthy, this is unproblematic on foundationalism since the looping principle is a self-evident first principle. By inferring from this foundational principle, we conclude that the deliverances of our faculties—that is, first principles—are probably true.[18] As I argued in the previous chapter, such confirmation of first principles is acceptable on foundationalism. As regards 2) confirming the trustworthiness of our faculties (i.e., the looping principle) from other first principles, I argued in the previous chapter that this, too, is acceptable on

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[17] Lehrer, "Chisholm, Reid and the Problem of the Epistemic Surd," 43.

[18] This inference will involve assuming the reliability of at least reason, and hence involve epistemic circularity. But as we have seen, epistemic circularity is acceptable on foundationalism.

foundationalism. All arguments for the reliability of our faculties will of course presuppose that (at least some of) our faculties are reliable. But this is only *epistemic* circularity, and we have seen that is fine in non-skeptical contexts. As we saw in section 3.2 of the previous chapter, Reid gives epistemically circular theistic arguments for the trustworthiness of our faculties. These confirm the looping principle and boost its justification. But all of this makes sense on foundationalism: On externalist grounds, all first principles, including the looping principle, are justified independently of one another. The looping principle transmits some of its foundational justification to all other first principles. And some of these other first principles transmit some of their foundational justification (but *not* the justification they received from the looping principle) to the looping principle. Lehrer has not yet given an example of mutual support in Reid's epistemology that cannot easily be interpreted in foundationalist terms.

Lehrer provides a third and final reason for thinking there are coherentist elements in Reid's epistemology:

> Principle seven is a looping principle, one, as Reid says, that vouches for its own truth. This principle is itself a principle of our faculties, and, therefore, the principle tells us that it is not fallacious. The principle vouches for itself. It loops around and supports itself. . . .
>
> The inclusion of the looping principle in his system shows that Reid is not a simple foundationalist.[19]

Lehrer is correct that the principle vouches for itself.[20] If it is a first principle that our natural faculties are trustworthy and if "this principle is itself a principle of our faculties," then it follows that this first principle is true. The looping principle vouches for itself. But does this give us additional justification for believing it? We can circularly infer the

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[19] Lehrer, "Chisholm, Reid and the Problem of the Epistemic Surd," 42–43.

[20] See Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 481.

principle from itself, but does this circular inference, this self-vouching, boost the principle's justification? Reid does not make this clear. If Reid is a simple foundationalist, the answer is no. And if his epistemology does contain coherentist elements, the answer is not clear. If a principle "loops around and supports itself," this *could* be coherence-building and hence justification-generating, but it need not be. Moreover, this loop is so small that it is questionable whether it builds coherence and generates justification on any plausible account of coherentism. It involves only a very few links: "Our faculties are reliable." "'Our faculties are reliable' is a deliverance of our faculties." "So, it is true that 'Our faculties are reliable.'" In sum, while the looping principle vouches for itself, it is not clear that this means it boosts its justification. But this would have to be the case for the looping principle's self-vouching to provide evidence of coherentist strands in Reid's epistemology. Finally, if the looping principle *does* boost its own justification by looping around on itself, then this requires a rather generous account of the type and extent of coherence needed to generate justification. The looping principle does not provide much, if any, reason to think Reid's epistemology contains coherentist elements.

1.2. Philip de Bary's Denial of Coherentism in Reid's Epistemology

Because Reid is generally considered a simple foundationalist, hardly anyone has taken the trouble of arguing Reid's epistemology does not contain coherentist strands. An exception is Philip de Bary:

> [C]oherentism . . . would seem to be inimical to Reid's whole conception of knowledge. . . . There are, it is true, certain isolated passages in which coherence among the beliefs of common sense is mentioned. But they are neither numerous nor important enough to make a reinterpretation of Reid as a coherentist at all plausible. . . .

> . . . There is no role, in this [coherentist] account, for self-sufficient foundational beliefs—beliefs that lend justification to other beliefs without ever needing to borrow it for themselves. For Reid, of course, the first principles of common sense are just such self-sufficient propositions.[21]

As de Bary correctly notes, a central tenet of Reid's epistemology is that there are "self-sufficient foundational beliefs." The principles of common sense, and more broadly, first principles in general, do not need other beliefs for their justification. They enjoy their own foundational justification, and they can "lend" this justification to beliefs that are properly founded on them. But, de Bary points out, according to coherentism all justification is a function of coherence among beliefs.[22] A belief has justification just because of its coherence with other beliefs. This picture of justification is clearly incompatible with Reid's central claim that there are foundational beliefs that enjoy justification independent of other beliefs. Hence, Reid is not a coherentist.

De Bary's argument approaches Reid's epistemology in too black-and-white of terms: *Either* Reid is a pure foundationalist, *or* he is a pure coherentist.[23] Since Reid is obviously not a pure coherentist, de Bary interprets him as a pure foundationalist. But it is possible to hold a reasonable position that combines elements of both foundationalism and coherentism.[24] By approaching Reid in these terms, de Bary is caught in the difficult

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[21] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 154–155.

[22] While a coherentist does not have to claim that the items that cohere are exclusively beliefs, de Bary is here (plausibly) assuming that if Reid were a coherentist, then it would be *beliefs* that cohere and generate justification.

[23] De Bary is aware that he is "[w]orking . . . with . . . rather 'broad-brushed' dichotomies" (ibid., 155), and he cites an unpublished paper by Keith Lehrer and John-Christian Smith where they "use these passages to emphasize a hitherto unnoticed coherentist strand in Reid's thought," although de Bary follows Daniel Schulthess in marginalizing this (163, note 3). These considerations do little, however, to moderate de Bary's rather cut-and-dried interpretation of Reid. Regarding Schulthess's discussion of the unpublished paper by Keith Lehrer and John-Christian Smith, see my footnote 2.

[24] Susan Haack's foundherentism is a particularly good example of such a combination; see Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: A Pragmatist Reconstruction of Epistemology*, 2nd, expanded edition

position of having to dismiss, reinterpret, or count as contradictory various passages in Reid. I will look at some of these passages below.[25] These interpretive gymnastics are largely avoidable, I submit, if Reid is allowed to speak for himself rather than being forced into that box with which he has the greatest affinity.

2. Coherentist Strands in Reid's Epistemology

By suggesting there are coherentist elements in Reid's epistemology in general, this section helps prepare the way for my argument that theistic coherentist arguments generate some justification. This section considers one instance of coherentist justification: the correspondence of visible and tangible figure. Reid is here discussing two means of sensory perception, the visual and the tactile:

> Hence it is evident, that the visible figure and extension of objects is so far from being incompatible with the tangible, that the first is a necessary consequence of the last, in beings that see as we do. The correspondence between them is not arbitrary . . . ; but it results necessarily from the nature of the two senses; and this *correspondence* being always found in experience to be exactly what the rules of perspective show that it ought to be if the senses give true information, *is an argument of the truth of both*.[26]

Reid does not here say that the correspondence between the visual and tactile senses gives further justification for the truth of some particular deliverance of both. For example, Reid is not here saying that seeing an apple gives justification for believing an apple exists, and feeling the apple gives additional justification for believing it exists. This would make sense on simple foundationalism: each sense provides further

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(Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2009). See also Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 180, and Keith DeRose, "Direct Warrant Realism," in *God and the Ethics of Belief: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Andrew Dole (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 150–172.

[25] De Bary claims Reid's track-record arguments are problematic given his foundationalism, though they would not be *if* he were are coherentist. As seen in chapter 5, however, epistemically circular track-record arguments can be acceptable on foundationalism.

[26] Reid, *IP*, II.xix, 225. Emphasis added.

justification for the deliverance of the other, for the same belief can be legitimately and independently arrived at through both senses. What Reid does say here is that the correspondence between the visual and tactile senses "is an argument for the truth of both" *senses*. It is not the case that one receives further justification for believing either sense is reliable because its reliability is foundationally inferable from the reliability of the other. Rather, it is awareness of the "*correspondence*" between them and their deliverances that gives one further reason for considering both senses veridical. In short, one receives further justification for the veridicality of both senses on coherentist, not foundationalist, grounds. The value of the coherence is not reducible to the value of mere consistency, or the absence of defeaters. Coherence has positive epistemic value, and "is an argument for the truth of" that which coheres. While Reid is not a simple coherentist, neither is he a simple foundationalist. He is a foundationalist with a limited role for considerations of coherence.

3. Coherence and Theism

The presence of coherentist strands in Reid's epistemology sheds new light on the role that theism plays in his work. Some passages provide fairly clear support for the claim that theism, via coherence, provides some justification for believing that our faculties are veridical. This conclusion in turn allows us to make sense of other passages that would be difficult to account for on simple foundationalism. One clear passage comes from Reid's *Inquiry*:

> I consider this instinctive belief [in "the informations of Nature [given] by my senses"] as one of the best gifts of Nature. I thank the Author of my being who bestowed it upon me, before the eyes of my reason were opened, and still bestows it upon me to be my guide, where reason leaves me in the dark. And *now* I yield to the direction of my senses, *not from instinct only*, but *from confidence and trust*

> *in a faithful and beneficent Monitor, grounded upon the experience of his paternal care and goodness*.[27]

Previously, Reid had yielded to his sensory perceptions "from instinct only." These beliefs were justified on externalist grounds. While Reid still justifiedly believes the deliverances of his perceptual faculties on externalist grounds, he now trusts them "not from instinct only." He now has *additional* justification for his perceptual beliefs—namely, his "confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor." Reid's belief in a beneficent God is, as he states here, "grounded upon the experience of his paternal care and goodness"—in other words, upon Reid's experiences via his perceptual faculties. Since Reid elsewhere gives arguments for the existence and perfections of God, his "confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor" is also grounded upon theistic arguments—arguments which are also based on his perceptions. Reid's theistic reasons for trusting his perceptual beliefs are circular: based on perceptual beliefs, he believes in God's existence and goodness, and this belief gives him further justification for his perceptual beliefs.[28] This inference is circular—viciously circular, if Reid were a simple foundationalist, but virtuously circular since his epistemology contains coherentist strands and these circles are coherence-building and hence justification-generating.

Reid further explains his trust in his faculties as grounded upon his experience of God's "paternal care and goodness." He does so by comparing his trust of his God-given faculties to his trust of testimony:

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[27] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 170. Emphases added.

[28] The perceptual beliefs whose justification is boosted could be different from the perceptual beliefs with which one starts. For instance, from perceptual beliefs B_1-B_{10} one might believe in God's existence and goodness, and this might give one further justification for perceptual beliefs B_{20}-B_{30}. In such a scenario, the inference would not have come full circle. The perceptual beliefs receiving a boost in justification would not be identical to the perceptual beliefs with which one started.

> In all this, I deal with the Author of my being, no otherwise than I thought it reasonable to deal with my parents and tutors. I believed by instinct whatever they told me, long before I had the idea of a lie, or thought of the possibility of their deceiving me. Afterwards, upon reflection, I found they had acted like fair and honest people who wished me well. I found, that if I had not believed what they told me, before I could give a reason of my belief, I had to this day been little better than a changeling. . . . And I continue to give that credit, from reflection, to those of whose integrity and veracity I have had experience, which before I gave from instinct.[29]

Reid instinctively but with justification believed what his senses told him before he could "give a reason" for these beliefs. Now, he continues to believe what his senses tell him not from instinct only, but "from reflection" upon the "fair and honest" way that God has treated him. He is using perceptual beliefs to arrive at a theistic reason for his perceptual beliefs. This is circular, and on foundationalism would not boost the justification of his perceptual beliefs. But because Reid has coherentist strands in his epistemology, his reflections build the coherence of his beliefs and this generates some justification for the cohering beliefs. In this way theistic, coherence-building reasoning boosts the justification of Reid's perceptual first principles.

In the *Intellectual Powers*, Reid again emphasizes that the original justification for our perceptual beliefs is non-inferential and based on the proper functioning of our faculties. Theism does not play a role in our original, instinctual knowledge, for such knowledge is possessed by the atheist as well as the theist. Nevertheless, the theist does have an *additional* reason to believe the deliverances of his constitution, and this boosts the justification of his perceptual first principles. But this justification-boosting is difficult to make sense of on simple foundationalism:

> In believing upon testimony, we rely upon the authority of a person who testifies: But we have no such authority for believing our senses.

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[29] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 170–171.

> Shall we say then that this belief is the inspiration of the Almighty? I think this may be said in a good sense; for I take it to be the immediate effect of our constitution, which is the work of the Almighty. But if inspiration be understood to imply a persuasion of its coming from God, our belief of the objects of sense is not inspiration; for a man would believe his senses though he had no notion of a Deity. He who is *persuaded that he is the workmanship of God*, and that it is a part of his constitution to believe his senses, may think that *a good reason to confirm his belief*: But he had the belief before he could give this or any other reason for it.[30]

The atheist and the theist both form perceptual beliefs from instinct, and with justification. But the theist has "a good reason to confirm his belief." This reason is his belief that God has created him and constituted him to form perceptual beliefs. And how does the theist come by this belief? Through perceptual beliefs. He confirms his perceptual beliefs through theistic reasoning based on his perceptual beliefs. This is circular. If Reid were a simple foundationalist, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to explain how such circular reasoning can boost the justification of perceptual beliefs. But because coherence is a source of justification and such reasoning is coherence-building, it generates some justification for the beliefs involved. Once again, theism gives Reid some further justification which we can readily make sense of in coherentist terms.

Reid's epistemology is plausibly understood as containing coherentist elements. While coherentist justification is not the primary form of justification and is not in general necessary or sufficient for knowledge, it is present, and can boost the justification of first principles. Interpreting Reid's epistemology as containing coherentist elements

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[30] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 231–232. Emphases added. In his discussion of this passage, de Bary claims it contains an "outright disavowal of theistic internalism" (de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 68). This is false. Reid does deny that "our belief in the objects of sense" depends upon theism; but this is merely a denial that our initial, instinctive perceptual beliefs depend upon theism. It is compatible with the beliefs later acquiring internalist theistic justification. Indeed, the end of the above passage suggests that such internalist theistic justification is possible, though it does not account for our original perceptual beliefs: "He who is persuaded that he is the workmanship of God, and that it is a part of his constitution to believe his senses, may think that a *good reason* to *confirm* his belief."

makes sense of otherwise problematic passages. Finally, we have seen that another way theism boosts the justification of first principles is by increasing justification-generating coherence. In the next chapter I will consider how theism allows for a special kind of knowledge, which I call *scientia*. *Scientia* involves understanding one's epistemic situation and seeing why it is favorable. This provides a global and particularly strong form of coherence, and hence further boosts one's justification. But as we will see, the value of *scientia* far exceeds the justification it provides.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Animal Knowledge, Rational Knowledge, Reflective Knowledge, and *Scientia*

In all three of his major works—the *Inquiry*, the *Intellectual Powers*, and the *Active Powers*—Reid makes an interesting, important, and overlooked distinction between two kinds or levels of knowledge. Extrapolating only slightly from Reid's texts, I will call these *animal knowledge* and *rational knowledge*. The basic distinction between them is that animal knowledge consists of instinctive beliefs that are deliverances of our non-rational faculties, whereas rational knowledge is based at least partially on an exercise of reason. I propose a further distinction within Reid's epistemology between *merely rational knowledge* and a subset of rational knowledge I call *reflective knowledge*. On my interpretation, the key distinction is that the possessor of reflective knowledge can give a reason for his belief. Finally, I show that Reid's epistemology contains a special kind of reflective knowledge, which I call *scientia*. *Scientia*, the highest form of knowledge, depends upon theism, showing yet another way theism is important in Reid's epistemology. As we will see, the distinctions between different kinds of knowledge are somewhat fluid. Pieces of animal knowledge and merely rational knowledge may be upgraded to reflective knowledge, and via theism all of one's knowledge may be upgraded to *scientia*.

This chapter reveals important and for the most part entirely overlooked distinctions and nuances in Reid's epistemology, and represents a significant and new development in the literature on Reid. To the best of my knowledge, only one person has

suggested a distinction in Reid's epistemology similar to the one I am proposing between animal knowledge and rational knowledge. In a very recent article, René van Woudenberg identifies a distinction in Reid that he notes is similar to Ernest Sosa's distinction between "animal knowledge" and "reflective knowledge."[1] My account, however, is significantly different from and more developed than van Woudenberg's, and contains distinctions and levels of knowledge not suggested by his article.

Reid's understanding of evidence is key for distinguishing reflective knowledge. I will not, however, attempt to give an exhaustive account of Reidian evidence, nor is this necessary. As I will show, there is no such thing as *the* Reidian account of evidence. Reid uses the term "evidence" in various ways and has multiple distinct, though related, notions of evidence. My main concern here is with that notion of evidence that distinguishes reflective knowledge from animal and merely rational knowledge, though I will also propose an account of instinctive evidence, the evidence possessed by non-reflective knowledge. While I will not attempt to survey the various accounts of Reidian evidence proposed in the literature, it should be noted that the account proposed here is not necessarily incompatible with those accounts.[2] So long as those accounts are interpreted as partial accounts of Reid's plural understanding of evidence, and not as *the* Reidian account, it may be possible to combine several of them with the account

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[1] René van Woudenberg, "Thomas Reid Between Externalism and Internalism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51, no. 1 (2013): 75–92; Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge*. My use of the phrases "animal knowledge" and "reflective knowledge" is not to be confused with Sosa's, though there are some obvious similarities.

[2] See, for example, Patrick Rysiew, "Reidian Evidence," *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (2005): 107–121; Patrick Rysiew, "Making It Evident: Evidence and Evidentness, Justification, and Belief," in *Evidentialism and Its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 207–225; William C. Davis, *Thomas Reid's Ethics: Moral Epistemology on Legal Foundations* (London: Continuum, 2006); Alston, "Reid on Epistemic Principles"; Van Cleve, "Reid on First Principles"; Greco, "Reid's Reply to the Skeptic"; van Woudenberg, "Thomas Reid Between Externalism and Internalism."

proposed here. I do not claim that my account of Reidian evidence is exhaustive or that it captures all the nuances of Reidian evidence. But it does bring to light some important distinctions in Reid's epistemology, solve some interpretive and philosophical problems, and help clarify some of the distinctions between different kinds of knowledge in Reid's epistemology.

I begin in section 1 by briefly distinguishing animal and rational knowledge and showing some of the textual support for this distinction and my choice of terminology. In section 2 I develop Reid's account of animal knowledge and consider the sense in which the beliefs involved in such knowledge have evidence and therefore amount to knowledge. In section 3 I present Reid's account of rational knowledge and distinguish merely rational knowledge from reflective knowledge. I show that reflective knowledge possesses a special kind of evidence, which I call reflective evidence. I further show that within Reid's epistemology animal knowledge and merely rational knowledge can be upgraded to reflective knowledge by acquiring reflective evidence. The possibility of such epistemic upgrades depends upon my argument in chapter 5 that the justification of first principles can be boosted. In section 4 I show that within Reid's epistemology theism can and does play a part in upgrading knowledge to reflective knowledge. I also show that theism provides Reid with a special kind of reflective knowledge, which I call *scientia*. I develop an account of Reidian *scientia* through a comparison with a very similar type of knowledge found in Descartes's epistemology.

1. Animal versus Rational Knowledge: A First Approximation

I base the language of *animal knowledge* and *rational knowledge* largely on a key paragraph from the *Intellectual Powers*. It begins as follows:

> It is, no doubt, the perfection of a rational being to have no belief but what is grounded on intuitive evidence, or on just reasoning.[3]

Reid notes that "the perfection of a rational being" is to have all its beliefs grounded on evidence. There are two kinds of evidence upon which such a being might ground its beliefs: intuitive evidence such as that possessed by self-evident truths, and discursive evidence, which is acquired through reasoning.[4] All the beliefs of such a being would either "arise from intuitive evidence in the thing believed" or be "the effect of reasoning."[5] Plausibly, the reason a perfectly rational being would have only beliefs grounded on one or the other of these two kinds of evidence is that all its beliefs would be deliverances solely of the faculty of reason, and reason has complete jurisdiction over only two kinds of beliefs: "We ascribe to reason two offices, or two degrees. The first is to judge of things self-evident; the second to draw conclusions that are not self-evident from those that are."[6] Since reason by itself judges only of self-evident truths and of truths ultimately inferred from self-evident truths, a perfectly rational being would have only beliefs grounded on either a) intuitive evidence in the thing believed or b) on reasoning from other truths—truths that are themselves either self-evident or ultimately grounded on self-evident truths.

While having all beliefs grounded on either intuitive or inferential evidence may be "the perfection of a rational being," Reid proceeds to note that this is not the lot of man:

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[3] Reid, *IP*, II.xxi, 238.

[4] Hereafter, by "intuitive evidence" I mean self-evidence.

[5] Reid, *IP*, II.xxi, 238.

[6] Ibid., VI.ii, 433.

> But man, I apprehend, is not such a being; nor is it the intention of Nature that he should be such a being, in every period of his existence. We come into the world without the exercise of reason; we are merely animal before we are rational creatures; and it is necessary for our preservation, that we should believe many things before we can reason. How then is our belief to be regulated before we have reason to regulate it? has Nature left it to be regulated by chance? By no means. It is regulated by certain principles, which are parts of our constitution; whether they ought to be called animal principles, or instinctive principles, or what name we give to them, is of small moment; but they are certainly different from the faculty of reason: They do the office of reason while it is in its infancy, and must as it were be carried in a nurse's arms, and they are leading strings to it in its gradual progress.[7]

As children, we are "merely animal." Our beliefs are not regulated by reason, and hence they are not grounded on either intuitive or inferential evidence. Our beliefs are rather "regulated by certain [animal] principles" of our constitution, that is, by mere instinct. I will later consider why on Reid's account such instinctive beliefs generally amount to knowledge, what I am calling *animal knowledge*. A large part of this story will obviously be Reid's proper functionalism, which I considered in chapter 4.

It is easy to misunderstand the beginning of the above quotation. It is easy to interpret Reid as claiming that while we are "merely animal" and not "rational creatures" as young children, when we grow up we are, or at least should be, perfectly rational creatures. Reid's statement that "nor is it the intention of Nature that he should be such a being, *in every period of his existence*," seems to suggest that it *is* "the intention of Nature" that *at some period of existence*—as mature adults—we should be perfectly rational beings, having all our beliefs grounded upon either intuitive or inferential evidence. Based on Reid's claim that "[t]o believe without evidence is a weakness which

[7] Ibid., II.xxi, 238–239.

every man is concerned to avoid,"[8] van Woudenberg thinks Reid has a "pejorative" view of instinctive beliefs.[9] Reid does not, however, have a negative view of instinctive beliefs. For instance, regarding our instinctive belief in the deliverances of our senses, Reid writes,

> I consider this instinctive belief as one of the best gifts of Nature. I thank the Author of my being who bestowed it upon me, before the eyes of my reason were opened, and *still* bestows it upon me to be my guide, where reason leaves me in the dark.[10]

According to Reid, even as fully mature adults we still have instinctive beliefs. This is appropriate and good, for humans are not exclusively and exhaustively rational beings. In the above passage we see Reid as a rational adult being thankful for such instinctive beliefs.

Reid can be understood as making a qualitative and a quantitative distinction regarding the rationality of humans. What distinguishes a mature adult as a "rational creature" from a child who is "merely animal" is not the absence of instinctive beliefs, but the presence of reason. Adults are no longer *merely* animal, but also rational. Once they acquire reason, they are qualitatively rational: Their beliefs are no longer regulated merely by instinct, but some beliefs are regulated either entirely or in part by reason. As the beliefs of such a qualitatively rational being become increasingly regulated by reason, we can speak of them being quantitatively more or less rational.

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[8] Ibid., II.xx, 228.

[9] Van Woudenberg, "Thomas Reid Between Externalism and Internalism," 89. The passage from Reid can plausibly be read as claiming that everyone attempts to avoid beliefs that lack *any* evidence. But, as we will see, instinctive beliefs do have a kind of evidence, which I will call instinctive evidence.

[10] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 170. Emphasis added.

With Reid's general distinction between animal and rational knowledge in mind, we are now ready to examine both in more depth.

2. Animal Knowledge and the Evidence of Instinctive Beliefs

As we have seen, animal knowledge consists of beliefs that are regulated not by reason but by non-rational instinct. As Reid puts it in the *Active Powers*, "[N]ot only our actions, but even our judgment, and belief, is, in some cases, guided by instinct, that is, by a natural and blind impulse."[11] These instinctive beliefs are produced through the operations of various non-rational doxastic principles of our constitution. Reid describes these as "[t]he natural principles, by which our judgments and opinions are regulated before we come to the use of reason,"[12] and he comments that they "seem to be no less necessary to such a being as man, than those natural instincts which the Author of nature hath given us to regulate our actions during that period" before we can use reason.[13]

Typical cases of perception supply good examples of instinctive beliefs.[14] In perception a sensation functions as an input that suggests, or triggers, the conception of an external object and the belief in its present existence. The regulatory mechanisms for this input-output system are the perceptual principles of our constitution. These perceptual principles are non-rational, and exist even in young children and animals. We

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[11] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 1.ii, 85.

[12] Reid's comment that these principles regulate our beliefs "*before* we come to the use of reason" should not be read as implying that after we can use reason these principles no longer regulate our beliefs. As already noted, his point is rather that before we can use reason these principles are the only things that regulate our beliefs. After we can use reason, our beliefs may be regulated by these natural principles, by reason, or by both.

[13] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 488.

[14] The qualifier "typical" is due to the fact that, as we will see in section 3.3, it is possible for animal knowledge to be upgraded to reflective knowledge. When upgraded, it is no longer merely instinctive.

might say that they function as *doxastic instincts*, or doxastic "natural and blind impulses." For instance, in response to the tactile sensation corresponding to a hard object, our tactile perceptual principles produce in us an instinctive belief in the present existence of a hard object. This process is entirely non-rational. As Reid comments,

> There is no reasoning in perception, as hath been observed. The belief which is implied in it, is the effect of *instinct*. . . .
>
> Perception, whether original or acquired, implies no exercise of reason; and is common to men, children, idiots, and brutes.[15]

Another example of animal knowledge is the instinctive belief of testimony. More precisely, *children's* instinctive belief of testimony is another example of animal knowledge, for as we will see, among adults the belief of testimony can be upgraded to reflective knowledge. Similar to the way we instinctively believe that to which our senses testify, we instinctively believe that to which our fellow humans testify:

> There is a much greater similitude than is commonly imagined, between the testimony of nature given by our senses, and the testimony of men given by language. The credit we give to both is at first the effect of *instinct only*.[16]
>
> I believed *by instinct* whatever [my parents and tutors] told me, long before I had the idea of a lie, or thought of the possibility of their deceiving me.[17]

At least as young children, we instinctively believe whatever we are told. This is because of the "principle of credulity": "Another original principle implanted in us by the Supreme Being, is a disposition to confide in the veracity of others, and to believe what they tell us."[18] Based on this non-rational principle of our constitution, children

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[15] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xx, 172, 173. Emphasis added.

[16] Ibid., VI.xx, 171. Emphasis added.

[17] Ibid., VI.xx, 170. Emphasis added.

[18] Ibid., VI.xxiv, 194.

instinctively believe what they are told. Knowledge acquired in this way is animal knowledge.

Animal knowledge consists of instinctive beliefs, beliefs triggered in accordance with the non-rational doxastic principles of our constitution. Reid contrasts such animal knowledge with rational knowledge, and especially reflective knowledge, which consists of beliefs grounded on evidence. It is therefore to be expected that Reid emphasizes that animal knowledge is not grounded on evidence. Animal knowledge consists of things believed instinctively "without any evidence at all"; it is shared by "brute-animals," and "is not grounded on evidence":

> [B]efore we grow up to the full use of our rational faculties, we do believe, and must believe, many things without any evidence at all.
>
> The faculties which we have in common with brute-animals, are of earlier growth than reason. We are irrational [i.e., non-rational] animals for a considerable time before we can properly be called rational. . . .
>
> If there be any instinctive belief in man, it is probably of the same kind with that which we ascribe to brutes, and may be specifically different from that rational belief which is grounded on evidence; but that there is something in man which we call belief, which is not grounded on evidence, I think, must be granted.
>
> We need to be informed of many things before we are capable of discerning the evidence on which they rest. Were our belief to be withheld till we are capable, in any degree, of weighing evidence, we should lose all the benefit of that instruction and information, without which we could never attain the use of our rational faculties. . . .
>
> . . . [Children] believe a thousand things before they ever spend a thought upon evidence. Nature supplies the want of evidence, and gives them an instinctive kind of faith without evidence.[19]

In contrast to reflective knowledge, animal knowledge is instinctive belief without evidence. It should be noted that while these instinctive beliefs are not rational, this does not mean they are irrational. Typical instinctive beliefs are non-rational but not irrational.

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[19] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 1.ii, 85–87. In *Inquiry*, V.vi, Reid notes that if we waited on the regulation of reason before we believed anything, we would never have any beliefs to weigh.

2.1. The Problem of Animal Knowledge

The lack of evidence for animal beliefs raises a major interpretive problem, which I will call *the problem of animal knowledge*. The problem is how instinctive animal beliefs, lacking evidence, can amount to knowledge. Reid insists that knowledge requires evidence. Perhaps his clearest statement on this matter comes from his correspondence:

> All knowledge therefore implies belief; but belief does not imply Knowledge. . . . It could not be said that I know any of these things if I did not believe them. Nor could I be said to know them if I had not good Evidence. Both these therefore must concur in Knowledge.[20]

Knowledge requires evidence. Reid also claims that instinctive beliefs, such as most perceptual beliefs, generally amount to knowledge. Indeed, in the same letter as the above passage, he writes, "By Perception I understand that immediate *Knowledge* which we have of external Objects by our Senses," and "I *know* what I distinctly perceive by my Senses."[21] Since knowledge requires evidence, this implies that perceptual knowledge, and more broadly animal knowledge, requires evidence. But as we have seen, Reid denies that (merely) instinctive beliefs have evidence. Reid seems to be committed to three inconsistent claims:

1) Evidence is necessary for knowledge.
2) Instinctive beliefs lack evidence.
3) Many instinctive beliefs amount to knowledge.

If instinctive beliefs lack evidence, and if evidence is necessary for knowledge, how can instinctive beliefs amount to knowledge? The key puzzle of animal knowledge is how it can be both animal (instinctive) and knowledge. To the best of my knowledge, the

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[20] Reid, *Correspondence*, 107–108 (1778, letter to Lord Kames; NAS MS GD24/1/569/19–21).

[21] Ibid., 107. Emphases added.

problem of animal knowledge has not been clearly identified or stated in the Reid literature.

My response to this puzzle is that Reid uses "evidence" and similar terms, such as "ground," in (at least) two general senses. I will call these *reflective evidence* and *instinctive evidence*. That Reid has (at least) two distinct notions of evidence is suggested by passages such as the following: "That the evidence of sense [i.e., of a form of animal knowledge] is of a different kind [from the evidence of reasoning], needs little proof."[22] When Reid insists that animal knowledge lacks evidence, he is speaking about reflective evidence. Animal knowledge lacks *reflective* evidence. When Reid insists that knowledge requires evidence, he is using "evidence" in a general sense that includes not only reflective evidence but instinctive evidence, the evidence possessed by animal knowledge. The above three claims are reconciled as follows:

1) Evidence, whether reflective, instinctive, or both, is necessary for knowledge.
2) Instinctive beliefs lack reflective evidence.
3) Many instinctive beliefs amount to knowledge.

These three claims are consistent: an instinctive belief can lack reflective evidence while possessing instinctive evidence and thereby amounting to knowledge.

Distinguishing two kinds of evidence, reflective and instinctive, solves the problem of animal knowledge. It reconciles those passages that create the above inconsistent triad. And as we will see, it provides a plausible interpretation of the different things Reid says about the evidence of instinctive beliefs, such as perceptual beliefs, and the evidence of reflective beliefs.

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[22] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 230. Emphasis added. Reid similarly remarks that he is "not able to find any common nature to which they all [i.e., the different kinds of evidence] may all be reduced" (*IP*, II.xx, 229).

Distinguishing two general types of evidence, instinctive and reflective, also solves a problem similar to the problem of animal knowledge. Reid claims instinctive beliefs lack evidence: "[B]efore we grow up to the full use of our rational faculties, we do believe, and must believe, many things without any evidence at all. The faculties which we have in common with brute-animals, are of earlier growth than reason."[23] These instinctive beliefs that lack evidence are deliverances of faculties that we have in common with animals. Reid is surely here talking (at least) about perceptual beliefs. We have these before we can use reason, and both we and animals have perceptual faculties. So Reid is here claiming that perceptual beliefs, being instinctive, lack evidence. But what then are we to make of Reid's repeated references to "the evidence of the senses"? How can perceptual beliefs lack evidence and also enjoy the evidence of the senses? My distinction between instinctive and reflective evidence solves this problem. When Reid denies that instinctive beliefs have evidence, he is speaking of reflective evidence, which requires reason. When he speaks of the evidence of the senses, he is speaking of instinctive evidence.

2.2. Instinctive Evidence

Reid is a pluralist regarding evidence. According to Reid, "The common occasions of life lead us to distinguish evidence into different kinds, to which we give names that are well understood; such as the evidence of sense, the evidence of memory, the evidence of consciousness, the evidence of testimony, the evidence of axioms, the evidence of reasoning." These different kinds of evidence are distinguished based on the faculty involved: perceptual beliefs have "the evidence of the sense," memorial beliefs

[23] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 1.ii, 85.

have "the evidence of memory," and so forth. Reid does not attempt to categorize this hodgepodge of kinds of evidence. He writes,

> I confess that, although I have, as I think, a distinct notion of the different kinds of evidence above mentioned, and perhaps of some others, which it is unnecessary here to enumerate, yet I am not able to find any common nature to which they may all be reduced. They seem to me to agree only in this, that they are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind, some of them in the highest degree, which we call certainty, others in various degrees according to circumstances.[24]

Reid cannot reduce all these different kinds of evidence to a "common nature." As van Woudenberg notes, what Reid here denies is that these different kinds of evidence "share a common *essential nature*." However, all these kinds of evidence "have the same *functional* characteristic: they produce belief in the mind."[25] My distinction between instinctive evidence and rational evidence introduces a new functional distinction based on the way evidence "produces" belief. Roughly, reflective evidence produces a belief in us by being a *reason* for the belief, and instinctive evidence produces a belief in us by being a mere *cause* of the belief.[26] Reid understands reasons in fairly robust and even argumentative terms. While it is true that all reflective evidence is internalist—it is something its possessor is aware of—instinctive evidence is mixed as regards the internalist and externalist distinction. Some instinctive evidence is something its possessor is aware of, and some is not. The distinguishing feature of instinctive evidence is that even if one is aware of it, it is not something one can give as a *reason* for the

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[24] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 229.

[25] Van Woudenberg, "Thomas Reid Between Externalism and Internalism," 80 note 8.

[26] I am not using "cause" in Reid's sense. According to Reid, all causation proper is agent causation.

belief; it merely instinctively occasions the belief. It is not a reason one can give in rational defense of the belief.

I am calling the evidence of animal knowledge *instinctive evidence*. Reid does not offer an account of instinctive evidence, making it difficult to say much about how he did or might have understood it. One thing is clear: Instinctive evidence is not reflective evidence. If one has reflective evidence, one "can give a reason for his judgment."[27] It follows that instinctive evidence is *not* the sort of thing one can give as a reason for one's belief.[28]

By a reason, Reid does not in this context mean a causal explanation. Reid explicitly makes a distinction between reasons and causal explanations in one of his manuscripts, and we should keep this distinction in mind in our interpretation of reflective and instinctive evidence. The following passage is from one of Reid's manuscript that James McCosh extracts in the appendix of *The Scottish Philosophy*. I have retained McCosh's quotation marks and his interpolations, and used ellipses for material I have omitted. As is clear from the lead-up to the following passage, Reid is discussing first principles of common sense.

> "Why do I believe first principles?" ". . . Answer, This question admits of two meanings. 1. For what reason do you believe first principles? 2. To what cause is your belief of first principles to be ascribed?" "To first, evidence is the sole and ultimate ground of belief, and self-evidence is the strongest possible ground of belief, and he who desires a reason for believing what is self-evident knows not what he means." To the second the answer is not so satisfactory. It is, "that belief is a simple and original operation of the mind which always accompanies a thing

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[27] Reid, *IP*, VIII.iv, 598. Emphases added.

[28] At least, not by itself. As we will see, animal knowledge can be upgraded to reflective knowledge. When this happens, it is possible that instinctive evidence might be one element of a reason for one's belief.

> we call evidence." "If it should be asked, what this evidence is which so imperiously commands belief, I confess I cannot define it."[29]

Reflective evidence is something one can give as a "reason" or "ground of belief." To give a causal explanation of a belief is not to give reflective evidence for it.[30]

Instinctive evidence is not something one can give as a reason for a belief. For instance, regarding perceptual knowledge of what exists, Reid writes,

> By his reason, [a philosopher] can discover certain abstract and necessary relations of things: But his knowledge of what really exists, or did exist, comes by another channel, which is open to those who cannot reason. He is led to it in the dark, and knows not how he came by it.[31]

Instinctive perceptual knowledge regarding what exists does not require reason, for it "comes by another channel." Moreover, one acquires a perceptual belief "in the dark, and knows not how he came by it." These are not the sort of beliefs for which one can give a reason.[32] Nonetheless, they generally amount to "*knowledge* of what really exists, or did exist," and thus must possess evidence. On the interpretation I am proposing, this is because they possess their own kind of evidence, instinctive evidence.

> That the evidence of sense is of a different kind [from the evidence of reasoning], needs little proof. No man seeks a reason for believing what he sees or feels; and if he did, it would be difficult to find one. But though *he can give no reason for believing his senses*, his belief remains as firm as if it were grounded on demonstration.[33]

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[29] Reid, "MSS. Papers by Dr. Reid," 475. This passage comes from the manuscript McCosh lists as "IV. Of Constitution" (474-476). At the end of the extracts from "Of Constitution," McCosh writes, "The paper is the dimmest and yellowest of all [the lent manuscripts]: looks old. Query: when written? The whole paper 11 pages."

[30] Or at least, these are not in general the same. I will later consider how these might merge in *scientia*.

[31] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 233.

[32] At least, not without additional work. I will consider this issue below in sections 3.3 and 4.

[33] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 230. Emphasis added.

A belief can enjoy "the evidence of sense" even if its possessor "can give no reason for believing his senses," even if it is a belief he "is led to . . . in the dark, and knows not how he came by it." Instinctive evidence is *not* reflective evidence, not evidence that one can give as a reason for some belief.

Since Reid does not offer a positive account of instinctive evidence, it is difficult to say much more regarding how he did or might have understood it.[34] I will note three plausible lines for reconstructing a Reidian account of instinctive evidence and briefly develop the third, which I consider the most promising.[35]

First, it is plausible to understand instinctive evidence in terms of Reidian signs. A sign suggests or occasions beliefs according to the doxastic principles of our constitutions. These triggers for belief could be understood as evidence for the beliefs they trigger. For instance, in the tactile perception of a hard object, the instinctive evidence for the belief in the present existence of a hard object would be the tactile sensation corresponding to the hard object. The sign account of instinctive evidence meets the above requirement that instinctive evidence is not something one can give as a reason for one's belief. According to Reid, many signs, and particularly those that serve as signs for original perceptions, fly through the mind so quickly and unnoticed that we could not cite them. For instance, regarding the sensation that serves as a sign for hardness, Reid writes that "it is never attended to, but passes through the mind

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[34] While my notion of instinctive evidence, and more broadly my plural understanding of Reidian evidence, are new, much in the literature on Reidian evidence is relevant. See footnote 2 for some relevant discussions of Reidian evidence.

[35] Reid clearly has a plural understanding of instinctive evidence, making it difficult, if not impossible, to give an overarching account. For a very interesting "panoramic tour" of Reid's various kinds of evidence, see van Woudenberg, "Thomas Reid Between Externalism and Internalism."

instantaneously."[36] Even if one can sometimes attend to the sign that suggests an instinctive belief, it still is not the sort of thing one can give as a *reason* for the belief. A sign is only the occasion, or cause, of a belief; it is not a *reason* for it, at least not in Reid's fairly robust sense of a reason.[37] It is not something from which one could infer the truth of the belief, for as Reid repeatedly emphasizes, in perception the sign and that which it signifies are entirely dissimilar. The connection between them is entirely contingent and, as far we can see, arbitrary.[38]

Second, instinctive evidence could be identified more broadly with Reid's proper functionalist view of justification developed in chapter 4: a belief has instinctive evidence when it is the product of truth-directed intellectual faculties that are functioning properly in an appropriate environment and are appropriately responsive to defeaters. This interpretation seems similar to the reliabilist interpretation of Reidian evidence proposed by John Greco and others.[39]

There is a third, more nuanced account of instinctive evidence that incorporates elements of the above two accounts and seems the most promising.[40] One issue that

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[36] Reid, *Inquiry*, V.ii, 56.

[37] Or at least, it is not a reason by itself. It may be one element of a reason for a belief; it may be one element of reflective evidence for a belief. As we will see, in the context of *scientia* the distinction between a causal explanation and a reason blurs.

[38] According to Reid, one exception is the visible figure of an object functioning as a sign for its real figure. See *Inquiry*, VI.vii.

[39] Greco, "How to Reid Moore," 562; Greco, "Reid's Reply to the Skeptic," 148–151.

[40] Van Woudenberg's account of Reid's "evidence of the senses" is similar to my account of instinctive evidence. Van Woudenberg proposes that "the evidence of the senses consists in the presence of the sensations that go with seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling." This is similar to the first account of instinctive evidence that I proposed. But van Woudenberg also claims that for any belief to enjoy positive epistemic status, certain reliabilist conditions must be met (van Woudenberg, "Thomas Reid Between Externalism and Internalism," 81, 82; see also 90). This makes his account of the evidence of the senses similar to my account of instinctive evidence.

complicates any account of instinctive evidence is Reid's distinction of some instinctive evidence as *good*, presumably in contrast to bad instinctive evidence. For instance, Reid writes, "I shall take it for granted, that the evidence of sense, when the proper circumstances concur, is good evidence, and a just ground of belief."[41] Moreover, it is just such *good* evidence that is necessary for knowledge. As Reid states in his previously quoted discussion of knowledge,

> It could not be said that I know any of these things if I did not believe them. Nor could I be said to know them if I had not *good* Evidence. Both these therefore must concur in Knowledge.[42]

One plausible interpretation of Reid's distinction between evidence and good evidence is that something which suggests or triggers an instinctive belief (i.e., a sign) is evidence in a loose sense. But it is only *good* evidence—evidence of the sort necessary for animal *knowledge*—"when the proper circumstances concur." That is, evidence is *good* evidence only if Reid's proper functionalist conditions are met. This account of (good) evidence fits well with various passages from Reid. For instance, Reid notes that there are "different kinds of evidence," such as the evidence of sense, and notes that they

> seem to me to agree only in this, that they are all fitted by Nature to *produce* belief in the human mind, some of them in the highest degree, which we call certainty, others in various degrees according to circumstances.
>
> I shall take it for granted, that the evidence of sense, *when the proper circumstances concur*, is *good* evidence, and a just ground of belief.[43]

The evidence of sense is what "produces" belief; it is what suggests or triggers a perceptual belief. But not anything that instinctively produces a belief is *good* evidence for that belief. To be good evidence, "the proper circumstances [must] concur." That is,

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[41] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 229.

[42] Reid, *Correspondence*, 107–108. Emphasis added.

[43] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 229. Emphases added.

good instinctive evidence for a belief is what instinctively triggers that belief when Reid's proper functionalist conditions are met. And a key component of Reid's proper functionalism is properly functioning faculties. As Reid says, "we measure the degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a *sound* understanding."[44]

This account of instinctive evidence is purely psychological. But it is also proper-functionalist: (good) evidence for a belief is that which triggers the belief in a properly functioning human.[45] As a result, this account avoids an objection that Van Cleve and Rysiew have raised to purely psychological characterizations of Reidian evidence.[46] Van Cleve and Rysiew both cite the following passage from Reid:

> [S]uch is the constitution of the human mind, that evidence discerned by us, forces a corresponding degree of assent. And a man who perfectly understood a just syllogism, without believing that the conclusion follows from the premises, would be a greater monster than a man born without hands or feet.[47]

Van Cleve and Rysiew note that since Reid's "monsters" are possibilities, it is a contingent matter as to whether we form a belief in response to the evidence for that belief. "But," Van Cleve objects, "it would *not* be contingent if the evident were *defined* as what compels assent."[48] Hence, Van Cleve and Rysiew conclude that Reid's account of evidence is not purely psychological.[49]

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[44] Ibid., VII.iii, 557. Emphasis added. While this passage occurs in the context of Reid discussing reflective evidence, I believe it applies to evidence in general.

[45] Alston suggests in passing the possibility of such an account: "This [passage] might suggest an 'ideal subject' conception of evidence, but I am not aware that this suggestion was ever developed by Reid" (Alston, "Reid on Epistemic Principles," 438).

[46] Van Cleve, "Reid on First Principles," 18; Rysiew, "Reidian Evidence," 111.

[47] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 481.

[48] Van Cleve, "Reid on First Principles," 18.

[49] I agree that Reid's account of *reflective* evidence is not purely psychological, but neither Van Cleve nor Rysiew make my distinction between two different kinds of evidence in Reid.

In response, I have not defined instinctive evidence for a belief as what always triggers that belief in anyone, including a "monster." Evidence for a belief is what "compels" that belief *in a properly functioning adult*; it "compels" belief when one is functioning according to one's design plan.[50] So it remains contingent as to whether evidence will compel belief in any given individual. In Reid's malfunctioning "monster," evidence will not compel belief. But it still *should*, for the "monster" should be functioning according to his design plan.

In a note Rysiew considers and dismisses such an account of evidence that is both purely psychological and proper functionalist. In response to the objection that "[s]urely the proponent of such a [purely psychological] view needn't say that evidence is what causes belief in *all* humans, including those with various mental impairments," Rysiew writes,

> It is not clear, though, whether this sort of restriction can be imposed while keeping the view purely psychological. For we'd need a way of specifying what is to count as a mental impairment which does not rely upon any ideas about what *should* cause belief. Putting it another way, if the proponent of such a view says that evidence is what causes belief in normal persons, he will need to provide some purely descriptive cashing-out of 'normal' itself, and it is not clear that a purely statistical notion of normalcy, say, would suffice.[51]

A proper-functionalist account of Reidian (instinctive) evidence that is purely psychological would have to provide an account of psychological normalcy that does not circularly appeal to what *should* cause belief. It would not be satisfactory to say that evidence is that which causes belief in a normal human, and a normal human is one in

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[50] Moreover, being a properly functioning adult in the fullest sense might involve possessing certain intellectual virtues, virtues that help one be appropriately responsive to evidence. However, since frequently one's response to instinctive evidence is largely if not entirely out of one's control, intellectual virtues will not directly play a prominent role in the appropriateness of one's response to most instinctive evidence. The case is very different as regards reflective evidence.

[51] Rysiew, "Reidian Evidence," note 10, pages 119–120.

which evidence causes belief. But, Rysiew objects, no purely descriptive and noncircular account of normalcy is forthcoming.

I agree that, given Rysiew's naturalistic outlook, there may be no such "purely descriptive cashing-out of 'normal'." But as a theist Reid has a ready response to Rysiew's objection. A "normal" person is one who is properly functioning, and to be properly functioning is to be functioning in accord with God's design.[52] This is a purely descriptive and noncircular account of a "normal," or properly-functioning, person. If Rysiew is correct that no naturalistic accounts of normalcy are forthcoming, this would not discredit Reid's account of instinctive evidence or my interpretation of it. It would rather highlight yet another way theism is important to Reid's epistemology. Theism is necessary for Reid to have an account of instinctive evidence that is both purely psychological and proper functionalist. More fundamentally, if Rysiew is correct, then it is just because Reid is a theist that he is able to have an adequate account of proper function, and hence to have a developed proper-functionalist epistemology.[53] Alvin Plantinga has argued just such a point regarding his own proper-functionalist epistemology: "[I]f, as it looks, it is in fact impossible to give an account of proper function in naturalistic terms, then metaphysical naturalism and naturalistic epistemology

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[52] Plantinga argues that for the theist "it is easy enough to say what it is for our faculties to be working properly: they are working properly when they are working in the way they were intended to work by the being who designed and created both them and us" (Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 197).

[53] If theism is necessary for developing a proper-functionalist epistemology, it does not follow that if a proper functionalist account of our knowledge is correct then one must be a theist to have knowledge. If a proper functionalist account of our knowledge is correct and the only account of proper function is a theistic one, then what follows is that God must exist, not that we must believe God exists. If knowledge requires God's existence in this way, then it follows that a naturalist will have a hard time giving a full account of knowledge.

are at best uneasy bedfellows. The right way to be a naturalist in epistemology is to be a supernaturalist in metaphysics."[54]

3. Rational Knowledge, Reflective Knowledge, and Reflective Evidence

Reid distinguishes between animal knowledge and rational knowledge based on the faculty that delivers the piece of knowledge. Animal knowledge is a deliverance of our non-rational faculties; rational knowledge is a deliverance of reason. Reason has two functions: "We ascribe to reason two offices, or two degrees. The first is to judge of things self-evident; the second to draw conclusions that are not self-evident from those that are."[55] Corresponding to these offices of reason are two main types of rational knowledge. First is knowledge of self-evident truths, and second is discursive knowledge, knowledge arrived at through reasoning. Within rational knowledge of self-evident truths, we can further distinguish between rational knowledge of contingent self-evident truths, such as many of Reid's principles of common sense, and rational knowledge of necessary or analytic self-evident truths.

Due to the diverse types of rational knowledge, not all rational knowledge possesses the same sort of evidence. The evidence of contingent self-evident propositions is different from that of necessary ones, which is different from the evidence of inferred truths. For reasons that will become apparent, I propose an interpretation according to which the evidence of contingent self-evident truths is a form of instinctive evidence. While knowledge of a self-evident contingent proposition is a form of rational knowledge

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[54] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 211.

[55] Reid, *IP*, VI.ii, 433.

because it is a deliverance of reason, it is in many ways similar to animal knowledge. I propose that the evidence of self-evident necessary truths[56] and the evidence of discursive knowledge belong to a different category. I will call the evidence of these types of rational knowledge *reflective evidence*, for it is evidence that one can give as a reason upon reflection. I will call rational knowledge that possesses reflective evidence *reflective knowledge*. I will call rational knowledge that lacks reflective evidence *merely rational knowledge*. Both merely rational knowledge and animal knowledge are forms of *instinctive knowledge*. Such knowledge consists of beliefs that are triggered by doxastic instincts and lack reflective evidence.[57]

3.1. Reflective Knowledge and Reflective Evidence

An illuminating illustration of the distinction between reflective knowledge and animal knowledge is Reid's distinction between rational and instinctive judgments of beauty. This passage also suggests the beginnings of a plausible interpretation of reflective evidence. According to Reid,

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

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[56] Or at least, those necessary truths that are not only self-evidently true but self-evidently necessary.

[57] Reflective knowledge is still instinctive in a sense, for according to Reid, "such is the constitution of the human mind, that evidence discerned by us, forces a corresponding degree of assent," assuming we are functioning properly (*IP*, VI.v, 481).

> In the plumage of birds, and of butterflies, in the colours and form of flowers, of shells, and of many other objects, we perceive a beauty that delights; but cannot say what it is in the object that should produce that emotion.[58]

Like animal knowledge in general, instinctive judgments of beauty are not confined to children and animals: "nor does it end with infancy, but continues through life." Mature adults, however, are also able to make rational judgments of beauty.

This passage indicates a number of ways rational judgments of beauty—and more broadly, reflective knowledge—differ from instinctive judgments. It is tempting to think that one such difference is the *immediacy* of the judgment. Based on the following sentence, one might think that animal beliefs, but not rational beliefs, are immediate, or not based on reflection: "Some objects strike us at once, and appear beautiful at first sight, without any reflection." While it is true that animal beliefs are immediate,[59] immediacy is not a distinctive feature of animal beliefs. Self-evident truths are also believed immediately, or without reflection, yet such beliefs are determinations of reason and hence rational. And as we will see, some self-evident first principles have reflective evidence. So while instinctive beliefs are immediate, they are not uniquely so.

The above block quote identifies several distinctive features of reflective knowledge that together begin to suggest an account of reflective evidence. First, in rational judgments that objects are beautiful, we are "able to say why we call them beautiful." By this, Reid means we are able to give a reason for our judgment. As he notes after the above passage, "[An adult] views [a beautiful machine] with the same agreeable emotion as the child viewed the pebble; but he can give a reason for his

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[58] Reid, *IP*, VIII.iv, 596.

[59] This is not to say instinctive beliefs are always *only* immediate. As we will see, a belief could be both instinctive/immediate and inferred.

judgment."[60] Not only can he give a reason for his judgment, but his rational judgment is grounded at least in part on that reason.[61]

Second and relatedly, in rational judgments of beauty one is "able to specify [some] perfection which justifies our judgment." As Reid explains a bit later, rational judgments of beauty are "grounded on some agreeable quality of the object which is distinctly conceived, and may be specified."[62] This and the previous feature of rational judgments of beauty are related. It is at least in part because one has a distinct conception of an agreeable quality in an object that one can specify it, or give it as a reason for one's judgments. It is at least in part because an adult admiring a beautiful machine can "point out the particular perfections of the object on which [his judgment] is grounded" that he "can give a reason for his judgment."[63] Indeed, to point out these perfections *is* to give a reason for his judgment.

These reflections point to a third feature of reflective knowledge. That which grounds one's judgment and which one can give as a reason for the judgment is a mental state, something inside the mind. For instance, the above rational judgment of beauty is "grounded on some agreeable quality of the object *which is distinctly conceived*." It is not the agreeable quality of the object that grounds the belief, but one's distinct *conception* of that quality, presumably in a perception of the object. This distinct conception is a mental state, and in this case it is an element of a perceptual mental state.

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[60] Reid, *IP*, VIII.iv, 598.

[61] This becomes clear in the following quotations.

[62] Reid, *IP*, VIII.iv, 598.

[63] Ibid.

These considerations suggest that reflective evidence, the evidence of reflective knowledge, consists of mental states that ground a judgment and upon reflection can be given as reasons for that judgment. In order for a mental state to be given or cited as a reason, it must be a mental state that one is aware of. One must be aware of that which one can specify or point to. If one is not aware of a mental state, then it is not the sort of thing one can (presently) give as a reason for one's belief. The fact that one is aware of a mental state makes it the sort of thing one can pick out. But actually picking it out—at least purposefully—as evidence for a belief requires that one also be aware of it as evidence for that belief. For example, if one were asked why one believes something and one randomly cited a mental state that would in fact count as a reason for this belief, one has failed to give this reason in a purposeful and reliable manner. Presumably, the fact that the mental state is an actual ground of the belief in question makes one aware of it as a ground for that belief. Finally, the mental states that count as reflective evidence must be distinct. This enables them to be specified and given as reasons: "some agreeable quality of the object which is *distinctly* conceived, and may be specified."

To give reflective evidence for a belief is to give a reason for it, as opposed to a mere causal explanation of it.[64] This criterion is central to Reid's distinction between instinctive and reflective evidence. In perceiving something, one might be aware of the sensation that triggers this perception. This sensation is a mental state. It might even be a distinct mental state. Moreover, one might be able to cite this sensation as the cause of

[64] I will later consider whether a sufficiently complex causal explanation of the right sort might not count as a reason. This would, of course, not be a reason on which one's instinctive belief was originally held. Being instinctive, it was not held for a reason. But one might acquire a reason for holding that belief; the belief might become both animal and reflective. And the reason for the instinctive belief might involve the right kind of causal explanation of it.

one's perceptual belief.[65] But this is not—or at least, not yet—to give a *reason* for one's perceptual belief. Reid seems to understand reasons in argumentative terms. They are things from which one might infer that which they are reasons for. They might serve as premises of an argument. They might be "weighed."[66] While a sensation might be the occasion of a perceptual belief, it is not a reason in Reid's fairly robust sense of the term. Reflective evidence for a belief is a distinct mental state that serves as a reason for that belief and can be given as a reason for that belief.

The "can" in "and can be given as a reason" need not include present physical ability to give the evidence as a reason. If someone is clearly aware of a mental state such that she could give it as a reason for her belief if she were physically functioning as a normal human, but she is in fact unable to communicate that reason due to extreme disabilities, that should not count against her possessing reflective evidence. The key thing for reflective evidence is being clearly aware of the distinct mental state as a ground for one's belief. In typical circumstances, such awareness enables one to give a reason for one's belief. That Reid's key concern in reflective evidence is a clear awareness of evidence, and not necessarily the ability to communicate such evidence to others, is suggested by passages such as the following: "But there are judgments of beauty that may be called rational, being grounded on some agreeable quality of the object which is distinctly conceived, and may be specified."[67] Key is the individual's clear awareness of the evidence, which makes her able to specify it, if only to herself.

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[65] I am here using "cause" in a loose sense. According to Reid, all causation proper is agent causation.

[66] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 1.ii, 86.

[67] Reid, *IP*, VIII.iv, 598.

In section 2.2 above, my third and most promising account of instinctive evidence contained a condition that tied instinctive evidence to truth. Instinctive evidence for a belief, or at least *good* instinctive evidence, is something that instinctively suggests or triggers that belief *when Reid's proper functionalist conditions are met*. This last requirement ensures that not any old trigger for any old belief counts as instinctive evidence for that belief. There must be a real, non-accidental connection between the evidence and that for which it is evidence. At the very least, evidence helps one get at the truth.

We should add a similar condition to our account of Reid's reflective evidence. Reflective evidence is not any distinct mental state that serves as some sort of a reason for some belief and can be given as a reason for that belief. We could here make a distinction between reflective evidence and *good* reflective evidence, similar to the distinction I proposed regarding instinctive evidence. However, Reid also makes a distinction between real and apparent evidence, and he makes this distinction in his discussion of rational knowledge. I therefore propose that we should understand reflective evidence as real or good reflective evidence. That which falls short of this standard is not reflective evidence, but only apparent evidence. In the passage where Reid makes this distinction, he writes,

> When we consider man as a rational creature, it may seem right that he should have no belief but what is grounded upon [reflective] evidence, probable or demonstrative; and it is, I think, commonly taken for granted, that it is always *evidence, real or apparent*, that determines our belief.
>
> If this be so, the consequence is, That, in no case, can there be any belief, till we find [reflective] evidence, *or, at least, what to our judgment appears to be evidence*. I suspect it is not so; but that, on the contrary, before we grow up to the

> full use of our rational faculties, we do believe, and must believe, many things without any [reflective] evidence at all.[68]

Reflective evidence is evidence that is a good and real ground for a belief. If one has reflective evidence for a belief, then she can give a good and real reason for that belief. I propose that when Reid speaks of a belief having reflective evidence, his proper-functionalism is in the background. He is assuming that the belief is the product of truth-directed intellectual faculties that are functioning properly in an appropriate environment and are appropriately responsive to defeaters. Part of functioning properly is being properly responsive to reflective evidence. When one encounters reflective evidence for a proposition, then in the absence of defeaters one believes that proposition. Understood in Reid's externalist framework, *real* reflective evidence reliably helps one get at the truth.

What we have said about Reidian reflective evidence works well for one type of rational knowledge, discursive knowledge. If one infers a proposition from other principles that one believes, one can give those principles as reasons for the proposition. Another type of rational knowledge is knowledge of self-evident truths. Does such knowledge possess reflective evidence? I will here consider that question as it applies to self-evident necessary truths.

Some self-evident first principles seem to possess reflective evidence. Specifically, such evidence seems to be possessed by first principles that are not only self-evidently true but self-evidently necessary.[69] Reid finds particular rational

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[68] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 1.ii, 85. Emphases added.

[69] Such principles are, of course, always self-evident *to someone*, not merely in themselves. Some principles might be self-evidently true and self-evidently necessary to most epistemically competent adults. Others might be self-evidently true to most adults, but self-evidently necessary only to those of "uncommon discernment and penetration" (Reid, "Curâ Primâ," 187). And some might be self-evidently true and self-evidently necessary only to those of "uncommon discernment and penetration."

satisfaction in the evidence of such principles and in the evidence of inferred principles (especially those entailed by self-evidently true and necessary principles):

> When I compare the different kinds of evidence above mentioned, I confess, after all, that the evidence of reasoning, and that of some necessary and self-evident truths, seems to be the least mysterious, and the most perfectly comprehended; and therefore I do not think it strange that Philosophers should have endeavoured to reduce all kinds of evidence to these.
>
> When I see a proposition to be self-evident and necessary, and that the subject is plainly included in the predicate, there seems to be nothing more that I can desire, in order to understand why I believe it. And when I see a consequence that necessarily follows from one or more self-evident propositions, I want nothing more with regard to my belief of that consequence. The light of truth so fills my mind in these cases, that I can neither conceive, nor desire any thing more satisfying.[70]

When a proposition is not only self-evidently true but self-evidently necessary, I not only find it obvious, but I "understand why I believe it." I "understand why" in the sense of understanding the reason I believe it. I believe it is true because it is necessary. I have a reason that I can give for my belief; I have reflective evidence. Not only that, I have "that evidence which I can best comprehend, and which gives perfect satisfaction to an inquisitive mind."[71] Necessary self-evident propositions seem to possess reflective evidence.

3.2. Merely Rational Knowledge

As we saw in chapter 3, according to Reid there are numerous self-evident truths that are neither necessary nor analytic.[72] Many of the principles of common sense fall within this category. Reid clearly thinks that in most cases of epistemically competent adults believing a contingent principle of common sense or some other self-evident

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[70] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 233; see also III.ii, 255–256.

[71] Ibid., II.xx, 233.

[72] Ibid., VI.v, 468.

contingent truth, the belief is rational. Such beliefs are rational in the sense of being deliverances of reason.

Do Reid's self-evident contingent first principles have reflective evidence? While they are deliverances of reason, they are instinctive in a manner similar to non-rational animal knowledge. We do not believe them by virtue of something that might count as a reason for believing them, and we cannot give a reason for them. We cannot, for instance, say that we believe they are true because we see they are necessarily true. As explained in chapter 2, our belief of such self-evident truths is, in accordance with certain doxastic principles of our constitutions, instinctively triggered in us upon clearly understanding them. As sensations serve as signs that trigger perceptions, so according to Reid the clear apprehension of a self-evident truth serves as the stimulus that triggers belief in itself. As Reid puts it at one point, "But there are other propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed. The judgment follows the apprehension of them necessarily."[73] At one point Reid actually describes our assent to self-evident propositions and our assent to perceptual beliefs in similar terms. Both are immediate and irresistible, things that our constitution instinctively determines us to believe.[74]

If someone asks me why I believe a contingent self-evident truth and I cite my clear apprehension of the truth, I have given only the occasion, or cause, of my belief. I have not given a reason for it, just as I have not given a reason for a perceptual belief if I

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[73] Ibid., VI.iv, 452.

[74] "It is, no doubt, one thing to have an immediate conviction of a self-evident axiom; it is another thing to have an immediate conviction of the existence of what we see; but the conviction is equally immediate and equally irresistible in both cases. No man thinks of seeking a reason to believe what he sees. . . . The constitution of our understanding determines us to hold the truth of a mathematical axiom as a first principle, from which other truths may be deduced, but it is deduced from none; and the constitution of our power of perception determines us to hold the existence of what we distinctly perceive as a first principle, from which other truths may be deduced, but it is deduced from none" (Reid, *IP*, II.v, 99–100).

simply cite the sensation that triggered it. While the belief of a self-evident contingent truth may be a deliverance of reason, in other respects such beliefs bear more resemblance to animal knowledge. They have instinctive evidence but lack reflective evidence.[75] I will call beliefs of this type *merely rational knowledge*.

I have suggested that things are different with propositions that are not only self-evidently true but self-evidently necessary. In response to the question, "Why do you believe this proposition?" I can respond that I believe it because I see it is necessary. This is a reason to believe it is true. But what about the judgment that a proposition is necessary? Does it, too, have reflective evidence? It is not easy to determine how we should answer this question, but it seems that for Reid it does.[76] As Reid writes, "When I see a proposition to be self-evident and necessary, and that the subject is plainly included in the predicate, there seems to be nothing more that I can desire, in order to understand why I believe it. . . . The light of truth so fills my mind in these cases, that I can neither conceive, nor desire any thing more satisfying."[77]

3.3. Upgrading Knowledge

Reid's distinction between reflective knowledge, on the one hand, and animal knowledge and merely rational knowledge, on the other, is a fluid one. Reflective knowledge requires possessing some reflective evidence for a belief. But it does not require holding that belief *only* based on one's reflective evidence. Since we can acquire

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[75] The evidence of merely rational knowledge may be rational in the sense that it forces the assent of *reason* to the proposition in question. But it is still not reflective evidence.

[76] Or at least, many self-evidently necessary propositions have reflective evidence, namely those that are analytic. See the following quotation.

[77] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 233.

reflective evidence for a belief that previously lacked such evidence, it is possible for animal knowledge and merely rational knowledge to become reflective. In so doing, the belief need not cease being instinctive or lose its instinctive evidence. It rather acquires additional evidence—reflective evidence—and thereby becomes reflective. Such upgraded animal knowledge is not exclusively rational, but it is rational nonetheless.

Both animal knowledge and merely rational knowledge consist entirely of first principles, things that are believed non-inferentially through the instinctive operations of our doxastic faculties. As we have seen, according to Reid such first principles are justified on externalist grounds. When a first principle that is a piece of either animal knowledge or merely rational knowledge is upgraded to reflective knowledge, it typically acquires additional justification. It now has reflective evidence, which gives it additional justification, though of a different sort.

These considerations show yet another reason my rejection of the No Justification Boosting Thesis in chapter 5 is so important. If the justification of Reid's first principles cannot be boosted, then instinctive first principles cannot be upgraded to reflective knowledge. They cannot acquire additional justification in the form of reflective evidence. But since the No Justification Boosting Thesis is false, it is possible to upgrade instinctive beliefs to rational knowledge, giving them additional justification.

Reid provides a number of instances of instinctive knowledge being upgraded to reflective knowledge through the acquisition of reflective evidence. One example comes from his discussion of aesthetic judgments:

> Although the instinctive and the rational sense of beauty may be perfectly distinguished in speculation, yet, in passing judgment upon particular objects, they are often so mixed and confounded, that it is difficult to assign to each its own province. Nay, it may often happen, that a judgment of the beauty of an

> object, which was at first merely instinctive, shall afterwards become rational, when we discover some latent perfection of which that beauty in the object is a sign.[78]

Our judgment that an object is beautiful may at first be "*merely* instinctive." Upon seeing the object, we immediately judge it beautiful, but we are not able to give a reason for our judgment. Upon examining the object and learning more about it, we may discover some perfection that gives us a reason for our aesthetic judgment. We now judge the object beautiful both instinctively and based on reflective evidence that we can give as a reason for our belief. Our belief is now no longer "*merely* instinctive," or animal knowledge. It has "become rational," or been upgraded to reflective knowledge.

Assent to testimony provides another example of animal knowledge being upgraded to reflective knowledge. According to Reid, young children instinctively believe whatever they are told. This is because of the "principle of credulity": "Another original principle implanted in us by the Supreme Being, is a disposition to confide in the veracity of others, and to believe what they tell us."[79] Through the operation of this non-rational principle of our constitution, "[t]he credit we give to [testimony] is at first the effect of instinct only."[80] Knowledge acquired through such instinctive credence is animal knowledge. Reid repeatedly emphasizes that children's belief of testimony is merely instinctive and lacks (reflective) evidence: "[I]n the first part of life, [children's belief] is governed by mere testimony in matters of fact, and by mere authority in all other matters, no less than by evidence in riper years. . . . And as they seek no reason, nor

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[78] Ibid., VIII,iv, 598.

[79] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 194.

[80] Ibid., VI.xx, 171.

can give any reason, for this regard to testimony and to authority, it is the effect of a natural impulse, and may be called instinct."[81]

While "[t]he credit we give to [testimony] is *at first* the effect of instinct only," this soon changes: "When we grow up to the use of reason, testimony attended with certain circumstances, or even authority, may afford *a rational ground of belief*; but with children, without any regard to circumstances, either of them operates like demonstration."[82] As we grow up, we learn to recognize circumstances that make it more or less likely that testimony is a reliable source of knowledge. Through reason, we "restrain" and regulate our trust in testimony in response to circumstantial evidence. Our trust in testimony is no longer merely instinctive. Through experience, reason "learns to suspect testimony in some cases, and to disbelieve it in others," depending on how unfavorable the circumstances are. In other cases,

> she mutually gives aid to [testimony], and strengthens its authority. For as we find *good reason* to reject testimony in some cases, so in others we find *good reason* to rely upon it with perfect security, in our most important concerns. The character, the number, and the disinterestedness of witnesses, the impossibility of collusion, and the incredibility of their concurring in their testimony without collusion, may give an irresistible strength to testimony, compared to which its native and intrinsic authority is very inconsiderable.[83]

Through attending to the circumstances of testimony and learning what circumstances make it more or less likely that testimony is truthful, reason can provide reflective evidence for testimonial beliefs. Such testimonial beliefs are thereby upgraded to reflective knowledge.

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[81] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 1.ii, 87.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 195. Emphases added.

Reid gives another way testimonial beliefs may be upgraded to reflective knowledge. Through reflecting on the track record of a testifier, one may acquire reflective evidence that he is generally truthful. This in turns provides reflective evidence for believing his testimony: "Afterwards, upon reflection, I found [my parents and tutors] had acted like fair and honest people who wished me well. . . . And I continue to give that credit, *from reflection*, to those of whose integrity and veracity I have had experience, which before I gave from instinct."[84] As a result of reflection and seeing that his parents and tutors were honest, Reid acquired reflective evidence for trusting their testimony. He can now give a reason for believing their testimony.

There are several ways that upgraded instinctive knowledge is more valuable than its merely instinctive counterpart. Such upgraded knowledge not only acquires additional justification, but acquires justification of a new sort. As a result of upgrading a piece of instinctive knowledge, one can give a reason for it. One's belief is not merely blind and instinctive. The belief is to some extent attributable to one's epistemic agency as a rational being, and to that extent it is something for which one deserves some credit. It is a distinctly human epistemic accomplishment. The belief is also to some extent based on evidence that one can give in defense of it. While this reflective evidence may not amount to "that evidence which I can *best* comprehend, and which gives *perfect* satisfaction to an inquisitive mind," it is nonetheless evidence that one can comprehend, and that gives some satisfaction to an inquisitive mind.[85] Moreover, the fact that one can now give a reason for the upgraded belief enables one to respond to certain skeptical

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[84] Ibid., VI.xx, 170.

[85] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 233.

worries, worries that might otherwise have undermined its status as knowledge. One's instinctive belief can now stand up to certain kinds of scrutiny. For instance, perhaps you are lost on a walk and ask a stranger for directions back to your hotel. You instinctively believe the directions he gives you. But you also observe the confidence with which he gives directions and his friendly demeanor. These give you some reflective evidence on which to base your belief in his testimony. After following his directions for a long time, you begin to doubt his directions. Surely you have gone too far. And you don't remember passing that building on your way out this morning. You begin to doubt your testimonial belief regarding the way back to your hotel. But then you recall your reflective evidence for your testimonial belief. The stranger was confident in giving directions and seemed to know what he was talking about. And he seemed friendly, and not the sort of person to play a mean prank. As a result of such reflective evidence that one can give in response to certain kinds of doubts, one might continue to believe someone's testimony, and to do so with justification.

Upgrading instinctive knowledge to reflective knowledge can present some epistemic dangers. As noted in chapter 5, Reid thinks that when one acquires inferential justification for a first principle, it may be tempting to accept that principle based solely on this inferential justification. This is understandable, for reflective evidence is more satisfying to the inquisitive mind than instinctive evidence. However, if one came to deny a first principle's status as a first principle and to accept it solely based on reflective evidence, one would be in an epistemically worse position. The principle would enjoy less justification than it otherwise would have, and it would likely have less justification than when it was accepted simply as a first principle. These considerations do not mean

one should avoid upgrading knowledge. They only show the importance of being aware of what one is doing and being appropriately cautious. Upgrading animal knowledge makes it reflective, but it does not make it knowledge. It was already animal *knowledge*.

4. Theism, Reflective Knowledge, and Reidian Scientia

Upgrading instinctive knowledge to reflective knowledge does not require theism. However, within Reid's epistemology theism can and does play an important role in upgrading many pieces of instinctive knowledge to reflective knowledge. It also enables the upgrade of many pieces of instinctive knowledge which would otherwise be very difficult, if not impossible, to upgrade. Perhaps most significantly, for Reid theism allows for a special kind of reflective knowledge, which I will call *scientia.* As we will see, theism enables one to achieve a global perspective on one's epistemic situation from which one can see that it is epistemically favorable and conducive to knowledge. From this perspective, the distinction between a causal explanation of a belief and a reason for that belief can blur. Via *scientia*, theism provides a reason to trust all one's doxastic faculties and believe their deliverances. It enables reason to endorse one's instinctive beliefs. The perspective afforded by theism thus allows for a comprehensive upgrade to reflective knowledge, rather than upgrading instinctive knowledge in a piecemeal fashion. This is not, however, to say that upgrading knowledge in the manner considered in the previous section is any less important, necessary, or valuable. These are different sorts of epistemic upgrades, and hence not in general redundant. They both enable one to give a reason for one's belief, but they enable one to give rather different sorts of reasons. Each sort of reason may be epistemically helpful in some situations where the other is not.

Reid does not give an explicit account of, much less a name for, the special kind of reflective knowledge that theism permits. I will call it *scientia*. I borrow this term from Descartes. In his "Second Set of Replies," Descartes makes a distinction between two kinds or levels of knowledge, *cognitionem* and *scientia*. Only a theist can possess *scientia*. On my interpretation of Reid, theism enables a special kind of knowledge very similar to Descartes's *scientia*, or at least to Descartes's *scientia* as interpreted and developed by James Van Cleve, Keith DeRose, and especially Ernest Sosa.[86] In *Reflective Knowledge*, Sosa uses the phrase "reflective knowledge" for Descartes's *scientia*. I am using "reflective knowledge" in a different sense. It also seems to me that this phrase fails to capture the fairly comprehensive perspective on one's epistemic situation that characterizes *scientia*. Hence, I will use *scientia* to refer to Reid's special kind of knowledge. When it may be unclear whether I am referring to *scientia* as understood by Descartes or by Reid, I will distinguish them as Reidian *scientia* and Cartesian *scientia*.

4.1. Theism and Standard Upgraded Knowledge

Within Reid's epistemology theism can and does upgrade pieces of instinctive knowledge in the standard way considered above in section 3.3. One example of this involves the following contingent principle of common sense: "That, in the phaenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar

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[86] James Van Cleve, "Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle," *The Philosophical Review* 88, no. 1 (1979): 55–91; Keith DeRose, "Descartes, Epistemic Principles, Epistemic Circularity, and *Scientia*," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 73 (1992): 220–238; Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge*. While Van Cleve does not distinguish *cognitionem* and *scientia*, he makes some relevant and helpful distinctions.

circumstances."[87] This is a self-evident first principle for epistemically competent adults who have contemplated it: "This is what every man assents to as soon as he understands it, and no man asks a reason for it. It has therefore the most genuine marks of a first principle." As a first principle, it is justifiedly believed so long as Reid's proper-functionalist conditions are met. However, it is a contingent truth, and so "has [not] that kind of intuitive evidence which mathematical axioms have. It is not a necessary truth."[88]As a contingent self-evident first principle, it is something one can justifiedly believe, but it is not a belief for which one can give a reason. It lacks reflective evidence.

Theism can provide reflective evidence for this principle. This not only boosts one's justification in believing it, but also enables one to give a reason for believing it. According to Reid,

> Indeed, if we believe that there is a wise and good Author of nature, we may see a good reason, why he should continue the same laws of nature, and the same connections of things, for a long time: because, if he did otherwise, we could learn nothing from what is past, and all our experience would be of no use to us. . . . [T]his consideration, when we come to the use of reason, may confirm our belief of the continuance of the present course of nature.[89]

While we may justifiedly believe this principle as a contingent self-evident first principle, these theistic considerations "may confirm our belief." We now have reflective evidence for the belief, and can give a reason for it.

4.2. Theism and Reidian Scientia

In the standard cases of upgraded knowledge we have considered so far, some particular belief is upgraded from merely instinctive knowledge to reflective knowledge.

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[87] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 489.

[88] Ibid., VI.v, 490.

[89] Reid, *Inquiry*, VI.xxiv, 196.

While theism can enable instinctive knowledge to be upgraded in this piecemeal fashion, for Reid it also enables a large-scale upgrade of knowledge. It does this by providing a perspective from which to see that one's epistemic situation is favorable, enabling a rational endorsement of one's instinctive knowledge, and indeed of all one's knowledge. Since the perspective afforded by theism might be more or less comprehensive, encompassing one's whole epistemic situation or only, say, perception, it follows that *scientia* might be more or less comprehensive. My discussion of *scientia* will assume that it is fairly comprehensive, as I believe Reid's is, but what I have to say about it will in general apply to some degree to less comprehensive forms of *scientia*.

One particularly clear example of *scientia* comes from Reid's discussion of perception. As Reid begins by noting, perception is at first a merely instinctive form of knowledge. Perceptual beliefs are triggered in us before the development of reason and even after the advent of reason:

> I consider this instinctive belief [in "the informations of Nature [given] by my senses"] as one of the best gifts of Nature. I thank the Author of my being who bestowed it upon me, before the eyes of my reason were opened, and still bestows it upon me to be my guide, where reason leaves me in the dark.

While Reid continues to have instinctive perceptual knowledge, this knowledge is no longer merely instinctive. His belief in God provides a perspective from which to see the epistemic credentials of his animal beliefs, and it is this perspective that explains his above expression of thankfulness to "the Author of my being." Reid proceeds:

> And *now* I yield to the direction of my senses, *not from instinct only*, but from confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor, grounded upon the experience of his paternal care and goodness.[90]

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[90] Ibid., VI.xx, 170. Emphases added.

Because Reid sees God, the "faithful and beneficent" Author of his being, as ultimately responsible for his instinctive perceptual beliefs, he can rationally endorse them. He now has a *reason* for accepting his instinctive perceptual beliefs. This reason applies not to just one perceptual belief, but to them all.

Other passages help clarify the exact nature of Reid's theistic reason for rationally endorsing not just his perceptual beliefs, but all of his beliefs—animal, merely rational, and even reflective. According to Reid, "The genuine dictate of our natural faculties is the voice of God, no less than what he reveals from heaven; and to say that it is fallacious is to impute a lie to the God of truth."[91]

Significantly, Reid claims only that the *genuine* dictates of our *natural* faculties are "the voice of God." If, for instance, one of our faculties is malfunctioning due to disease or injury, then the dictate of that faculty may be false. But the dictate of a malfunctioning faculty is not a genuine dictate of the faculty. It is not a dictate of the faculty as God designed it, and hence it is not "the voice of God." Reid also claims only that the genuine dictates of our *natural* faculties are "the voice of God." By this, Reid presumably means to exclude at least the dictates of some acquired perceptual powers. If, for example, we form a fallacious acquired perceptual power, perhaps through inattentiveness on our part, the dictates of this "faculty" are not "the voice of God." They are not the dictates of a natural, God-given faculty, nor are they the dictate of an acquired perceptual power formed in accordance with the blueprint for forming such powers.

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[91] Reid, *AP*, IV.vi, 229; see also Reid, *IP*, I.iii, 51; Thomas Reid, "Three Lectures on the Nature and Duration of the Soul," in *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, by Thomas Reid, ed. Derek R. Brookes (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 622.

Because we are created by God, the genuine dictates of our natural faculties are "the voice of God." God has designed us to have certain beliefs in response to certain stimuli, and hence he is responsible for those beliefs.[92] But this does not yet give us a reason to think these God-given beliefs are *true*. If we were created by a whimsical God, he might have given us fallacious faculties as a grand joke. It is therefore significant not only that the dictates of our faculties are God-given, but that they are given by "the God of truth." Reid clearly recognizes this point: "If candour and veracity be not an essential part of moral excellence, there is no such thing as moral excellence, nor any reason to rely on the declarations and promises of the Almighty."[93] Reid here assumes that God possesses moral excellence. If veracity were not an essential part of God's moral excellence, then God might have given us faculties that were inherently fallacious. But according to Reid veracity is an essential attribute of God.[94] Hence, we *do* have reason to rely upon "the voice of God." Because we are created by a good, truthful God, we have reason confidently to believe the dictates of the faculties he has given us[95]:

> Our intellectual powers are wisely fitted by the Author of our nature *for the discovery of truth*, as far as suits our present estate. *Error is not their natural*

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[92] God's responsibility for these beliefs is even more direct than this given Reid's occasionalism. According to Reid, all causation proper is agent causation. Sensations do not, properly speaking, cause our perceptual beliefs. They only *occasion* these beliefs, through God's activity in accordance with the perceptual laws he has established.

[93] Reid, *AP*, IV.vi, 229.

[94] Ibid., IV.xi, 263.

[95] Other divine attributes are also relevant to this point, though perhaps not as directly. For instance, it is surely important that God is competent. An all-good, truthful, and well-meaning God who was incompetent might intend to give us reliable, truth-directed intellectual faculties but fail miserably in this endeavor.

> *issue*, any more than disease is of the natural structure of the body. . . . The understanding, in its natural and best state, pays its homage to truth only.[96]

Theism, or at least traditional theism, gives one a reason to think all one's faculties are veridical. By providing a perspective on one's epistemic situation from which one can see that it is epistemically favorable, theism can upgrade all of one's knowledge to *scientia*.

From the perspective of *scientia*, the distinction between a causal explanation of a belief and a reason for that belief blurs.[97] *Scientia* provides a causal explanation of why I have a belief that has epistemic significance and amounts to a reason for that belief. To say, for example, that certain sensory stimuli trigger in me certain beliefs does not by itself amount to a reason for those beliefs. With just this piece of information, I cannot rationally endorse those beliefs, even though on externalist grounds I may still be justified in forming and retaining them. But when set within the context of *scientia*, such a causal explanation becomes an element of an explanation that is a reason. Not only do certain sensory stimuli trigger in me certain beliefs, but God, who is truthful, has given me faculties for the discovery of truth. The mechanisms that produce these instinctive beliefs in response to sensory inputs are truth-directed. Such a causal explanation is both descriptive and normative. It tells me why I have certain beliefs, that I am justified in forming them on externalist grounds, and hence that I can and should rationally endorse them. The externalist facts that render my beliefs justified become internalist reasons for my beliefs when I become aware of those facts.

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[96] Reid, *IP*, VI.viii, 527–528. Emphases added. For a passage stating God intends us to have *knowledge* of the external world through our perceptual powers, see II.v, 101.

[97] According to Christopher Hookway, "For Reid justification and explanation are distinct" (Hookway, *Scepticism*, 116). While Hookway's claim is in general correct, it is not true in the case of *scientia*.

The reason *scientia* provides for our instinctive beliefs is defeasible in particular cases. For instance, perhaps I have reason to think my tactile perception in my left hand is not functioning properly due to a nerve injury. In this case, *scientia* no longer provides an all-things-considered reason to think tactile perceptions in my left hand are veridical. Likewise, if I have reason to think I am suffering from jaundice, then *scientia* does not give me an all-thing-considered reason to think my current perceptual beliefs regarding color are true. *Scientia* provides a reason to trust a faculty and upgrades the deliverances of that faculty only so long as one does not have a good reason to think the faculty is malfunctioning. More broadly, it provides a reason only if one does not have good reason to think one or more of Reid's externalist requirements are not met.

4.3. Developing Reidian Scientia*: Reid and Cartesian* Scientia

My account of Reidian *scientia* is in many respects similar to accounts of Cartesian *scientia*, making it illuminating to compare them. The account of Cartesian *scientia* presented by Van Cleve and Keith DeRose helps illuminate part of Reidian *scientia*, and Sosa's account helps illuminate the remaining elements of Reidian *scientia*.

While Reidian *scientia* may confirm some piece of knowledge, that piece of knowledge does not depend upon theism. Whether it be animal knowledge, merely rational knowledge, or reflective knowledge, its status as knowledge does not depend upon belief in God. Such knowledge can be possessed by the atheist as well as the theist. But the theist nonetheless has an additional reason for thinking that some piece of knowledge amounts to knowledge. He has *scientia*. For example, regarding perception Reid writes,

> In believing upon testimony, we rely upon the authority of a person who testifies: But we have no such authority for believing our senses.

> Shall we say then that this belief is the inspiration of the Almighty? I think this may be said in a good sense; for I take it to be the immediate effect of our constitution, which is the work of the Almighty. But if inspiration be understood to imply a persuasion of its coming from God, our belief of the objects of sense is not inspiration; for a man would believe his senses though he had no notion of a Deity. He who is *persuaded that he is the workmanship of God*, and that it is a part of his constitution to believe his senses, may think that *a good reason to confirm his belief*: But he had the belief before he could give this or any other reason for it.[98]

The atheist and the theist both have perceptual beliefs from instinct. These beliefs are, moreover, justified on externalist grounds. The *fact* that God designed our perceptual faculties to give us true beliefs makes our perceptual beliefs justified. Their justification does not require us to be aware of this fact. But if the theist becomes aware of it, he has "a good reason to confirm his belief." His perceptual belief is no longer mere animal knowledge, but *scientia*.

These features of Reidian *scientia* closely parallel the account of Cartesian *scientia* presented by Van Cleve and Keith DeRose.[99] Descartes is often accused of basing his epistemology on a viciously circular appeal to theism. From a place of skeptical doubt, he uses his faculties to prove that God exists, and from God's existence he proves that his faculties are trustworthy. But since it is these very faculties that were used to prove God's existence, it follows that his argument is (purported) viciously circular. Reid is one person who accuses Descartes of such a viciously circular appeal to God.[100]

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[98] Reid, *IP*, II.xx, 231–232. Emphases added.

[99] Van Cleve does not discuss *scientia*, but he makes some very important and helpful distinctions, distinctions that DeRose adopts in his account of *scientia*.

[100] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 480–481.

Van Cleve and DeRose have defended Descartes's circle against the charge of vicious circularity based on a distinction between two levels or kinds of knowledge, *cognitionem* and *scientia*.[101] Descartes's circle does not provide the very same knowledge it requires to get started, but rather upgrades that knowledge from *cognitionem* to *scientia*. In a key passage from Descartes's "Second Set of Replies," he writes,

> The fact that an atheist can be "clearly aware [*clare cognoscere*] that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles" is something I do not dispute. But I maintain that this awareness [*cognitionem*] of his is not true knowledge [*scientia*], since no act of awareness that can be rendered doubtful seems fit to be called knowledge. Now since we are supposing that this individual is an atheist, he cannot be certain that he is not being deceived on matters which seem to him to be very evident. . . . And although this doubt may not occur to him, it can still crop up if someone else raises the point or if he looks into the matter himself. So he will never be free of this doubt until he acknowledges that God exists.[102]

Descartes thinks an atheist can have a kind of knowledge, *cognitionem*, but only a theist can have "true knowledge," or *scientia*. Drawing from DeRose and Van Cleve, we can distinguish these two levels of knowledge as follows. The atheist and the theist have *cognitionem* of particular propositions, such as "the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles," by virtue of their beliefs falling under the following epistemic principle: "(A) For all *P*, if I clearly and distinctly perceive that *P*, then I am certain that *P*."[103] *Cognitionem* does not require that I believe this epistemic principle; the simple fact that it is true and that my clear and distinct perception that *p* falls under it guarantees that I am certain of *p*, that I have *cognitionem* of *p*. This is similar to the way Reid thinks the

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[101] DeRose, "Descartes and Epistemic Circularity"; Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge*; Van Cleve, "Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle." As already noted, Van Cleve does not distinguish *cognitionem* and *scientia*, but he makes some very relevant distinctions.

[102] René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), vols. II, 101.

[103] Van Cleve, "Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle," 66.

theist and the atheist can have knowledge simply by virtue of it being the case that they have properly functioning, truth-directed faculties. If we were to state Reid's proper-functionalist criteria for knowledge in an epistemic principle, all that knowledge requires is that this principle be true and that my beliefs fall under it. I need not have ever even thought of this epistemic principle, much less believed it.

Cartesian *scientia* of *p*, however, requires that I both (1) clearly and distinctly perceive that *p*, and (2) clearly and distinctly perceive the general epistemic principle that whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true.[104] That is, *scientia* of *p* requires both *cognitionem* of *p* and *cognitionem* of the general epistemic principle (A). In the Cartesian circle, Descartes begins with *cognitionem* of particular propositions. He reasons from these to the existence of a non-deceptive God, and from there he comes to have *cognitionem* that whatever he clearly and distinctly perceives is true. He now has *scientia* of the particular propositions with which he began. Since the *cognitionem* that the circle presupposes is different from the *scientia* that it delivers, it is not viciously circular. According to Descartes, a distinguishing mark of the theist's *scientia* is its indubitable nature; it cannot be rendered doubtful. The theist not only knows *p*. He knows that he knows *p*.

As a moderate foundationalist, Reid does not aspire to the indubitable certainty of Cartesian *scientia*. But in other respects Reidian *scientia* is very similar to its Cartesian counterpart. Reid starts with beliefs that are justified on proper-functionalist grounds, similar to the way Descartes starts with *cognitionem*. Like Descartes, Reid builds on this

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[104] DeRose, "Descartes and Epistemic Circularity," 224. DeRose later adds the following condition for *scientia*: "one must also meet *some* further requirement to the effect that one recognizes the connection between the general principle that what one clearly and distinctly perceives is true and one's belief that p" (ibid., 227).

knowledge to arrive at knowledge of a good and essentially truthful God. And from God's existence Reid, like Descartes, comes to know the epistemic principle that underwrote his earlier knowledge. On proper functionalist grounds, Reid is justified, via a theistic inference, in believing that those proper functionalist grounds are satisfied. Using truth-directed epistemic faculties, he comes to know that his faculties are God-given and hence truth-directed. Like Descartes, Reid now has *scientia* of the knowledge with which he began. He not only knows *p*. He knows that he knows *p*.

While Reidian *scientia* parallels Cartesian *scientia* as explained by Van Cleve and DeRose, Reidian *scientia* goes beyond their account in ways that parallel Sosa's account of Cartesian *scientia*. If our account of Reidian *scientia* were to end where Van Cleve and DeRose's account of Cartesian *scientia* does, we would be left with a puzzle. Thus far, the key feature of Reidian *scientia* is knowing that one knows *p*. One knows *p*, perhaps as a piece of animal knowledge, and one knows that the faculties that deliver this piece of animal knowledge are veridical. This is doubtlessly valuable and an epistemic accomplishment. But how is the theist with Reidian *scientia* in a significantly different epistemic position from the atheist who has contemplated Reid's seventh principle of contingent truths? According to Reid, "Another first principle is, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious."[105] According to Reid, this is a self-evident principle of common sense, and hence something any epistemically competent adult, including an atheist, can justifiedly believe as a first principle. Let us call an atheist who believes this as a first principle a *reflective atheist*. Is the epistemic situation of a theist with *scientia* better than that of a reflective atheist?

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[105] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 480.

Both have animal knowledge of *p*. Both know that their natural faculties are reliable. And if they realize that their animal knowledge of *p* is a deliverance of their reliable natural faculties, then they both know that they know *p*. If anything, it might seem that the reflective atheist is in an epistemically superior position to the theist. He seems to have arrived at the same place, but in a simpler and less circuitous manner.

Sosa's account of Cartesian *scientia* helps show how Reid's theist is epistemically better off than the reflective atheist. According to Sosa, the *scientia* possessed by Descartes's theist requires "that the knower have an epistemic perspective on his belief, a perspective from which he endorses the source of that belief, from which he can see that source as reliably truth conducive."[106] This passage suggests two quite different understandings of Cartesian *scientia.* According to the first, *scientia* requires only a perspective from which to endorse the source of a belief. This is possessed by the reflective atheist. Based on the self-evident principle of common sense, he knows that his faculties are reliable, and hence can endorse the source of his belief. The other understanding of *scientia* suggested by the above passage is the one Sosa intends to express, and it is this understanding of *scientia* that most significantly distinguishes the reflective atheist from Reid's theist with *scientia*. According to Sosa, Cartesian *scientia* requires a perspective from which to *see* that one one's faculties are reliable. This requires understanding:

> Attaining [*scientia*] requires a view of ourselves—of our beliefs, our faculties, and our situation—in the light of which we can see the sources of our beliefs as reliable enough (and indeed as perfectly reliable if the *scientia* desired is absolute and perfect).

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[106] Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge*, 135.

> Prominent among values of [*scientia*] is that of understanding. It is in part because one understands how one knows that one's knowing reaches the higher level.[107]

Sosa's account of Cartesian *scientia* goes beyond that of Van Cleve and DeRose in requiring a fairly comprehensive worldview, a perspective from which one can *see* that one's epistemic situation is favorable. One does not merely know that one's faculties are reliable; one does not merely know that one knows. One "understands how one knows," can see why one's epistemic situation is favorable, and hence can "defend one's commitments in the arena of reflective reason."[108]

This nicely illuminates a key feature of Reidian *scientia*, a feature that distinguishes the theist with *scientia* from the reflective atheist. Both the theist and the atheist know lots of things. Both know that their faculties are reliable, and both know that the deliverances of these faculties generally amount to knowledge. Both of them can know *p* and know that they know *p*. But the theist, unlike the atheist, does not merely know *that* his faculties are reliable and *that* he knows *p*. Mere knowledge *that* is bare knowledge. It is knowledge that lacks a reason, that lacks reflective evidence.[109] Or more cautiously, it is knowledge that lacks a particular kind of reason. It is knowledge that lacks an account, an explanation, a story. The reflective atheist lacks an overarching, comprehensive worldview from which he can *see* that his faculties are reliable and his epistemic situation is favorable. Without this meta-perspective on himself as a knower and his epistemic situation, he lacks Reidian *scientia*. Without *scientia*, the reflective

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[107] Ibid., 151, 138.

[108] Ibid., 148.

[109] Hookway got this point exactly right: "[w]e need an explanation of how our practice provides us with knowledge. Otherwise, the appeal to common sense leaves us convinced *that* we have knowledge of reality but unable to understand our right to this conviction" (Hookway, *Scepticism*, 119, emphasis in the original).

atheist also lacks a non-arbitrary stopping point for inquiry into why he should trust his faculties. While such a stopping point may not be necessary, nevertheless the theist, but not the atheist, has a final explanation for why his faculties are trustworthy. Christopher Hookway has nicely captured some of these points in his brief but exceptional treatment of Reid. According to Hookway, Reid's epistemological use of theism

> is not primarily one of justification. The reliability of our faculties is self-evident, and stands in no need of justification. However it is natural to seek a systematic understanding of ourselves and our capacities; the benevolence of God *explains* our possession of reliable faculties although it has no role in justifying our belief that they are reliable. This may *add* to the justification which these beliefs already possess but it has no role in warranting our initial acceptance of them.[110]

I would only add that the reliability of our faculties *typically* "stands in no need of justification," that it is not the mere benevolence but the *veracity* of God that "*explains* our possession of reliable faculties,"[111] and that, as we have seen, theism may boost justification in ways that do not involve an explanation of the reliability of our faculties—that is, in ways that do not involve *scientia*.

For both Descartes and Reid, *scientia* protects the theist from certain potentially undermining skeptical worries. The atheist, however, lacks *scientia*, and hence is

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[110] Hookway, *Scepticism*, 116. Hookway makes a similar point on the next page: "The problem is that our ability to control our reasoning, directing them in accordance with our cognitive aims, seems to depend upon a kind of ungrounded trust: we hope that our natural faculties are attuned to discovering the truth without an explanation of why this should be. A believer can appeal to God's benevolence to underwrite this hope but a secular epistemologist appears to have nowhere to turn. . . . Reid's view of justification is more satisfactory to the believer who subordinates his practices to the will of God than to someone who attempts to exercise autonomous self-control over his inquiries" (ibid., 117).

[111] Philip de Bary approvingly quotes the above passage from Hookway, though he would disagree that theism "may *add* to the justification" of our beliefs. De Bary proceeds, however, to argue that Reid cannot rest assured in this explanation of the reliability of our faculties. His argument is based on his claim that for Reid God's veracity is a genuinely open question: God may be benevolent, but God's benevolence may involve or even require paternalistic deception of humans. As already noted, Reid does not consider God's veracity an open question. In the next chapter I respond directly to de Bary's extended argument regarding the possibility of divine paternalistic deception (de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 188).

susceptible to these skeptical worries. Descartes notes that while the atheist geometer may have *cognitionem*, this

> is not true knowledge [*scientia*], since no act of awareness that can be rendered doubtful seems fit to be called knowledge. Now since we are supposing that this individual is an atheist, he cannot be certain that he is not being deceived on matters which seem to him to be very evident. . . . And although this doubt may not occur to him, it can still crop up if someone else raises the point or if he looks into the matter himself. So he will never be free of this doubt until he acknowledges that God exists.[112]

Reid makes a similar point regarding the epistemic security that a theist with *scientia* enjoys but an atheist lacks. In the lead-up to the following key, neglected passage from the *Active Powers*, Reid has been discussing the two leading and rational principles of action, "a regard to our happiness upon the whole, and a regard to duty." He writes,

> As to the supposition of an opposition between the two governing principles, . . . this supposition is merely imaginary. There can be no such opposition.
>
> While the world is under a wise and benevolent administration, it is impossible, that any man should, in the issue, be a loser by doing his duty. Every man, therefore, who believes in God, while he is careful to do his duty, may safely leave the care of his happiness to him who made him. He is conscious that he consults the last most effectually by attending to the first.
>
> Indeed, if we suppose a man to be an atheist in his belief, and, at the same time, by wrong judgment, to believe that virtue is contrary to his happiness upon the whole, this case . . . is without remedy. . . . He must either sacrifice his happiness to virtue, or virtue to happiness; and is reduced to this miserable dilemma, whether it be best to be a fool or a knave.
>
> This shews the strong connection between morality and the principles of natural religion; as the last only can secure a man from the possibility of an apprehension, that he may play the fool by doing his duty.[113]

According to Reid, the atheist, like the theist, may believe happiness and duty are never opposed. This is similar to how Descartes's atheist geometer possesses *cognitionem* "that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles." But as Descartes's atheist

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[112] Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. II, 101.

[113] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 3.viii, 194. While I do not deny that Reid frequently notes the importance of theism to moral motivation, the passages quoted here are primarily concerned with moral *epistemology*. They therefore have direct relevance to the role of theism in Reid's epistemology more generally.

geometer "will never be free of this doubt [or potential doubt based on the possibility that he is being deceived] until he acknowledges that God exists," so similarly for Reid only theism "can secure a man from the possibility of an apprehension, that he may play the fool by doing his duty." Only because Reid believes "the world is under a wise and benevolent administration" can he confidently assert that "[t]here can be no such opposition" between performing one's duty and pursing one's true happiness. Similar to Cartesian *scientia*, Reidian *scientia* provides a favorable perspective on one's epistemic situation, and this protects one from many potentially undermining skeptical worries.

These final considerations suggest another important function theism might play in Reid's epistemology. Theism, unlike atheism, might protect one from potential defeaters to knowledge, defeaters that might be global and devastating. Perhaps theism not only boosts the justification of first principles and upgrades first principles to reflective knowledge or even *scientia*. Perhaps theism also provides a perspective within which certain kinds of skeptical worries and defeaters will never arise in the first place. I consider this possibility in chapter 8.

I have argued for an interpretation of Reid's epistemology according to which it contains a distinction between animal knowledge and rational knowledge. Animal knowledge consists of merely instinctive beliefs. These possess instinctive evidence and are justified on Reid's proper functionalist grounds. Rational knowledge is a deliverance of reason, and there are three types of it. Merely rational knowledge is similar to animal knowledge in possessing only instinctive evidence. Reflective knowledge possesses reflective evidence, evidence that one can give as a reason for one's belief. Animal knowledge and merely rational knowledge can be upgraded to reflective knowledge.

Finally, *scientia* is a distinctive and important form of reflective knowledge made possible by theism, showing yet another important role theism plays in Reid's epistemology. While reflective knowledge and *scientia* have various epistemic advantages over merely instinctive knowledge, they are also distinctly human accomplishments and rightly valued for their own sake.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Reid, Plantinga, and the Garden of Theism

Chapters 5 and 6 argued that in Reid's epistemology theism can and does boost the justification of various first principles, including first principles of common sense concerned with the reliability of our faculties. Chapter 7 argued that theism can upgrade pieces of instinctive knowledge to reflective knowledge and that theism allows for a special kind of knowledge, *scientia*. This chapter argues that within Reid's epistemology theism helps protect and preserve the justification of first principles. Theism does so in virtue of *scientia*, or providing a favorable perspective on our epistemic situation. I argue that plausibly for Reid atheism does not provide a similarly favorable perspective. Hence, the theist stands on epistemically surer ground than the atheist. Unlike the atheist, the theist is not susceptible to certain undermining skeptical doubts. Theism is not, however, in general necessary for knowledge. It only makes knowledge more secure.

Alvin Plantinga has made a very similar argument regarding the role of theism in his own Reid-inspired epistemology. According to Plantinga's Main Argument against Naturalism (or as it has more recently been called, his Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism),[1] the conjunction of naturalism and Darwinian evolution provides a reason to doubt one's beliefs are generally true.[2] Since most naturalists accept Darwinian evolution, it follows that if a naturalist is deeply reflective, she will likely realize her

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[1] Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, chapter 10.

[2] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, chapter 12.

beliefs give rise to this doubt, and hence have a defeater for any belief she may have. Theism, by contrast, does not provide a reason for its adherents to doubt the deliverances of their faculties. While Plantinga does not claim to be presenting or interpreting Reid's views, his epistemology is inspired by Reid, raising the question of whether theism might play a similar role in Reid's epistemology. This chapter will argue theism can play a role in Reid's epistemology similar to the role it plays in Plantinga's, for the key moves in Plantinga's Main Argument are Reidian. I further show there is good textual evidence that Reid not only could but actually did hold a position very similar to Plantinga's. I will not, however, here attempt to assess the soundness of Plantinga's Main Argument against Naturalism.[3]

There exists a small body of literature on whether theism can and does play a Plantingian role in Reid's epistemology. In his introduction to the Edinburgh critical edition of Reid's *Inquiry*, Derrick Brookes advances the unpopular opinion that theism plays such a role:

> Reid's point . . . is that the *rationality* of this belief [that the deliverances of our faculties are, for the most part, reliable] is best sustained within the context of Providential Naturalism. For on this account, there is no reason to believe that scepticism about the external world is a live possibility. Providential Naturalism is a philosophical system, a set of beliefs of which no member either affirms or leads to the denial of the reliability of our faculties—a feature, Reid argued, that could not be claimed of a system such as David Hume's.[4]

I largely agree with Brookes' claim, though it is false that for Reid no belief "affirms . . . the reliability of our faculties." However, as some of his critics have noted, Brookes fails

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[3] For a discussion of the soundness of Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism, see James Beilby, ed., *Naturalism Defeated?: Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). De Bary briefly considers the soundness of Plantinga's argument in *Reid and Scepticism*, 186-187.

[4] Brookes, "Introduction," xxii.

to substantiate his claim.[5] In the footnote immediately following the above passage, Brookes refers the reader, not to anything in Reid, but to Plantinga's work.

Several commentators have taken pains to distance Reid's epistemology from Plantinga's and argue that theism does not and cannot play a Plantingian role in it.[6] They argue the reliance of Plantinga's epistemology on theism is fundamentally un-Reidian, despite obvious similarities between the two epistemologies. In defiance of Plantinga's Main Argument against Naturalism, several commentators have claimed that Reid's epistemological appeals to divine benevolence could without loss be replaced with appeals to naturalistic evolution.[7] Daniel Robinson and Tom Beauchamp even go so far as to claim that "Reid's constitutionalism . . . is naturalistic—even Darwinian; its explanation is rooted in the adaptive success of all animal species. . . . That Reid attributes survival to a providential God is beside the point."[8]

Against this consensus, I argue that the key moves in Plantinga's Main Argument are Reidian, that theism can play a Plantingian role in Reid's epistemology, and that there is good reason to think that for Reid theism does play a Plantinga-style role. These are, of course, somewhat speculative theses, and Reid was unaware of some of the key distinctions and science on which Plantinga's argument depends. Nonetheless, these

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[5] Todd, "An Inquiry into Thomas Reid."

[6] See, for example, de Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*; Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism"; Todd, "An Inquiry into Thomas Reid"; Keith Lehrer, *Thomas Reid* (London: Routledge, 1989); Keith Lehrer and Bradley Warner, "Reid, God and Epistemology," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2000): 357–372.

[7] See, for example, Lehrer, *Thomas Reid*, 196; Keith Lehrer, "Reid on Primary and Secondary Qualities," *The Monist* 61, no. 2 (1978): 190; Todd, "Review: *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*"; D. D. Todd, "Review: *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 41, no. 4 (2002): 819–822; Todd, "An Inquiry into Thomas Reid."

[8] Robinson and Beauchamp, "Personal Identity," 336.

theses are supported by Reid's epistemological writings, contra the general consensus. While I will respond to several scholars who deny my central theses, my main arguments are responses to Philip de Bary, who has a chapter-long argument against my position. His chapter represents the most sustained and in-depth treatment of the topic to date.

In arguing for these theses, I am not defending the following claims. I am not arguing that in Reid's epistemology theism is necessary for justification or knowledge. As I argued in chapter 4, Reid is an externalist regarding justification and knowledge, and hence no particular belief, including theism, is necessary for justification or knowledge. I am therefore not defending the claims that Reid's epistemology depends upon a dogmatic or a viciously circular appeal to God. I rejected both of those claims in chapter 5. In Reid's epistemology theism is not necessary for knowledge, but theism, unlike atheism, provides a perspective within which certain kinds of skeptical worries and defeaters will never arise in the first place.

In section 1 I briefly explain Plantinga's Main Argument against Naturalism. In section 2 I show how several objections to theism playing a Plantingian role in Reid's epistemology rest on misunderstandings of Plantinga. In section 3 I consider the structural similarities of Reid's and Plantinga's epistemologies. In particular, I respond to de Bary's arguments that they are in important respects dissimilar, and hence that the reliance of Plantinga's epistemology on theism does not suggest a similar reliance for Reid's epistemology. In section 4 I argue contra de Bary and others that Reid can accept both premises of Plantinga's Main Argument and that Plantinga's arguments for these premises are Reidian. I close in section 5 by suggesting that not only is Plantinga's position Reidian and something Reid could accept, but that Reid did in fact hold a

position very similar to Plantinga's. Theism both can and does play a Plantinga-style role in Reid's epistemology.

1. Plantinga's Main Argument

In *Warrant and Proper Function*, Plantinga argues that knowledge is best characterized as true belief with a sufficient degree of warrant, and warrant is best understood "in terms of proper function: a belief has warrant, for a person, if it is produced by her cognitive faculties functioning properly in a congenial epistemic environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at the production of true or verisimilitudinous belief."[9] Plantinga's proper-functionalist account of warrant is very similar to Reid's proper-functionalist account of justification developed in chapter 4.

Plantinga argues that within the framework of proper functionalism, evolutionary naturalism gives rise to Darwin's Doubt: "Evolution is interested, not in true beliefs, but in survival or fitness. It is therefore unlikely that our cognitive faculties have the production of true belief as a proximate or any other function, and the probability of our faculties' being reliable (given naturalistic evolution) would be fairly low"—or, even "more plausible" for the evolutionary naturalist, "either the rational attitude to take toward this probability is the judgment that it is low, or the rational attitude is agnosticism with respect to it."[10] The consequence, according to Plantinga's Main Argument, is that the evolutionary naturalist who encounters his argument has an undefeated (and in principle undefeatable) undercutting defeater for any belief she may have. For any belief, including naturalism, there is a significant chance it is false. This

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[9] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 237.

[10] Ibid., 219, 231.

supports the final conclusion, which is not that naturalism is in fact false, but "that (for one who is aware of the present argument) accepting naturalism is irrational."[11] Naturalism generates a global defeater for any naturalist who reflects too deeply into her epistemic situation.[12]

The traditional theist, by contrast, has a "stable" set of beliefs that does not give rise to such an undercutting defeater: "*qua* traditional theist—*qua* Jewish, Moslem, or Christian theist—he believes that God is the premier knower and has created us human beings in his image, an important part of which involves his endowing them with a reflection of his powers as a knower. . . . [T]he theist has nothing impelling him in the direction of such skepticism in the first place."[13] The upshot, according to Plantinga, is that "naturalistic epistemology flourishes best in the garden of supernaturalistic metaphysics."[14]

2. Getting Plantinga Right: Responses to Misplaced Objections

Several objections to theism playing a Plantingian role in Reid's epistemology rest on misunderstandings of Plantinga and the role theism plays in his epistemology.

Some scholars have argued that theism does not play a Plantingian role in Reid's epistemology because Reid's epistemology does not *require* theism for justification and

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[11] Ibid., 235. As Plantinga notes, while this might make it irrational to accept one's beliefs as true, one might nonetheless retain them since they are instinctive (ibid., 231).

[12] More precisely, the combination of metaphysical naturalism, evolution, and "the cognitive faculties we have . . . and what sorts of beliefs they produce" generates this defeater (*Warrant and Proper Function*, 220).

[13] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 236, 237.

[14] Ibid., 236. Interestingly, the naturalist Thomas Nagel largely agrees with Plantinga's argument. See, for example, Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26–29.

knowledge.[15] Rysiew disagrees with Brookes' Plantingian claim that "Reid's point . . . is that the *rationality* of this belief [that the deliverances of our faculties are, for the most part, reliable] is best sustained within the context of Providential Naturalism."[16] Rysiew responds as follows:

> [T]o say that Reid held that the rationality of our belief in the reliability of our faculties is "best sustained" by (among other things) a belief in God is most naturally taken as implying that Reid thought that without the help of theism, believing one's faculties not to be fallacious is less than fully rational. But that seems to me not to be Reid's view at all.[17]

Rysiew is correct in his interpretation of Reid. Clearly Reid did not think that without theism it is "less than fully rational" to believe one's faculties are reliable. But Brookes does not claim this in his Plantingian interpretation of Reid, nor does Plantinga make such a claim in his own epistemology. Brookes' point, like Plantinga's, is that our belief in the reliability of our faculties is "*best* sustained" within the context of theism. The claim is not that theism is necessary for rationally believing our faculties are reliable, nor is the claim "most naturally taken as implying" this. Because Rysiew is mistaken regarding what it would mean for theism to play a Plantingian role in Reid's epistemology, his objection to theism playing such a role misses the mark.

De Bary similarly mistakes what Plantinga's Main Argument claims to establish. Regarding Plantinga's statement that "naturalistic epistemology flourishes best in the garden of supernaturalistic metaphysics," de Bary writes,

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[15] Lehrer and Warner write that according to Plantinga "naturalism in epistemology does require supernatural metaphysics. In brief, that is his argument that R [i.e., reliabilism], or Reid's version thereof, . . . requires the assumption that God exists" ("Reid, God and Epistemology," 366).

[16] Brookes, "Introduction," xxii.

[17] Rysiew, "Reid and Epistemic Naturalism," 441.

> As it stands, the import of this slogan is relatively weak. It is not claiming that naturalistic epistemology *can't* flourish, still less that it can't subsist *at all*, in a garden of naturalistic metaphysics—the claim is only that it flourishes *best* in the theistic setting. Now this weaker claim will plainly be easier to defend. . . . But the curious thing is that Plantinga presents the slogan in summary of two arguments, one of which is for the *stronger* claim. . . . The unavoidable conclusion [of the Main Argument], welcomed by Plantinga, is that naturalistic epistemology can't get by *at all* without God—it is defeated by an "ultimately undefeatable defeater." . . . But if Plantinga is right in saying that the assumption of the [general reliability of our faculties] is only tenable for the theist, then (so long as the Reid/Plantinga parallel is close enough) it will not be the case that Reid's references to God are without epistemological significance (as Somerville has it). On the contrary, they will evidently be part of the shrubbery in the supernaturalistic garden in which, and *only* in which, the [claim that our faculties are generally reliable] can survive.
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> Plantinga's advertised slogan—to the effect that reliabilism "flourishes best" in a garden of theism—masked a much stronger conclusion, namely, that *unless* so situated, reliabilism can't exist at all.[18]

By "survive" and "exist," de Bary clearly means *rational*, as opposed to irrational, survival and existence. Despite de Bary's repeated statements to the contrary, the Main Argument neither claims nor entails that "the supernaturalistic garden" is the garden "in which, and *only* in which, the [claim that our faculties are generally reliable] can survive" rationally. At least three times in his Main Argument, Plantinga clearly makes the point that accepting naturalism (N) and evolution (E) is not sufficient for someone to have a defeater for Naturalism or to be irrational in thinking her faculties are reliable:

> [O]ne who accepts N&E (*and is appraised of the present argument*) has a defeater for N&E, a defeater that cannot be defeated by an ultimately undefeated defeater. And isn't it irrational to accept a belief for which you know you have an ultimately undefeated defeater?[19]

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[18] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 171, 177. All emphases in the original.

[19] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 235. Emphasis added. This point is made twice more on page 235. Plantinga seems to have slid into non-philosophical speech in the final sentence. The key seems to be that it is "irrational to accept a belief for which you *justifiably believe* you have an ultimately undefeated defeater." The irrationality of this situation does not seem to depend on whether the belief amounts to knowledge.

Plantinga allows that one could rationally accept N&E and hold that our faculties are generally reliable; naturalistic epistemology can exist rationally within a naturalistic metaphysics, and it might even be able to flourish to some extent. But it can exist rationally *only if the naturalist does not encounter Plantinga's argument (or its equivalent) or think about the issue too hard on his own*. While the claim that our faculties are generally reliable can rationally be held by the uniformed naturalist who has not reflected too deeply on his epistemic situation in light of his other beliefs, the point remains that N&E generates a global defeater upon reflection, and if the naturalist encounters this defeater, then he can no longer rationally accept either naturalism or the general reliability of his faculties. Since surely no epistemology can fully flourish without reflection on the interrelations of its central beliefs, it follows that naturalistic epistemology cannot flourish best in a garden of naturalistic metaphysics: in that garden, it can be deeply reflective and self-transparent, or it can be rational, but not both.

Another common misperception concerns the epistemic advantages Plantinga claims for theists *vis-à-vis* naturalists. Some commentators incorrectly interpret Plantinga as claiming that *both* theists and naturalists have doubts or a defeater regarding the reliability of their faculties, but that theists, unlike naturalists, have a defeater for this doubt. The advantage of theism is that it provides a defeater defeater. Moreover, these interpreters claim it is the *assumption* of theism that does this work and purportedly provides an epistemic advantage for theists. While temporarily entertaining a Plantingian interpretation of Reid before rejecting it, de Bary writes,

> Reid thinks that there are no good reasons for doubting his [claim that our faculties are generally reliable]—*but perhaps without God there would be*. That is to say, it may be that Reid's doubts about the truth of our faculties only vanish at a certain point because of his implicit assumption that they are the product of an

> intelligent designer. . . . His theistic assumptions, on this view, are non-detachable since they are required to stave off doubts which would otherwise persist.[20]

In this passage de Bary claims that on a Plantingian interpretation theism is "required to stave off doubts which would otherwise persist." That is, on a Plantingian interpretation, Reid *has* doubts, and theism removes them: "Reid's doubts about the truth of our faculties only vanish" because of "[h]is theistic assumptions." In their denial that theism could play a Plantingian role in Reid's epistemology, Lehrer and Warner similarly claim that according to Plantinga the epistemic advantage of theism is that it defeats defeaters:

> The crux is that there is nothing in the assumption of naturalism, in the assumption that our faculties are the work of Nature, to offset doubts about the convictions resulting from our nature assuming the theory of evolution. To offset such doubts and sustain the evidence of such convictions . . . , we require the assumption that God exists to defeat the doubts about whether our faculties . . . [are] trustworthy and not fallacious.
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> [T]his assumption of theism defeats a defeater for the acceptance of the [reliability of our faculties] which naturalism cannot defeat. There is nothing in the assumption that our beliefs are the result of faculties supplied to us by nature to offset doubts about the trustworthiness of our faculties.[21]

Contra de Bary, Lehrer, and Warner, Plantinga does not claim that theism "stave[s] off doubts which would otherwise persist" or "defeats a defeater." Plantinga's point is that for the theist no doubts parallel to those of the naturalist ever arise in the first place. There are no such doubts which would "persist" if they were not "staved off," no such defeaters to be defeated. Unlike naturalists, theists have a "stable" set of beliefs: "[T]he theist has nothing impelling him in the direction of such skepticism in the first place." Moreover, Plantinga explicitly notes that *if* the theist had a global defeater analogous to what he claims reflective naturalists have, then theism would be of no help:

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[20] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 70. Emphasis in the original.

[21] Lehrer and Warner, "Reid, God and Epistemology," 366.

"Suppose . . . you find yourself with the doubt that our cognitive faculties produce truth: you can't quell that doubt by producing an argument about God and his veracity, or indeed, any argument at all; for the argument, of course, will be under as much suspicion as its source."[22] De Bary, Lehrer, and Warner not only misunderstand the role theism plays in Plantinga's epistemology, but they claim theism plays a role that Plantinga denies it could play.

De Bary, Lehrer, and Warner also claim it is the *assumption* of theism that does all the work for Plantinga and hence would do all the work for Reid if his epistemology was relevantly similar. De Bary claims that "Reid's theistic assumptions, on this view, are non-detachable since they are required to stave off doubts which would otherwise persist." And according to Lehrer and Warner, "It is the assumption of theism without proof of the truth of it that is needed to offset the doubts."[23] However, for Reid theism is not a mere assumption. It is, or at least can be, a justified belief that amounts to knowledge, and Reid gives a number of arguments in support of theism. Plantinga also claims that belief in God can be rational and amount to knowledge.[24] It is not a mere assumption but a rational, justified belief that affords theists an epistemic advantage.

3. Structural Comparison of Reid's and Plantinga's Epistemologies

The majority of de Bary's final chapter in *Thomas Reid and Scepticism* seeks to show that, despite obvious parallels between the epistemologies of Reid and Plantinga, they ultimately are dissimilar, and Plantinga's dependence upon theism is un-Reidian.

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[22] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 237.

[23] Lehrer and Warner, "Reid, God and Epistemology," 366.

[24] For Plantinga's argument that belief in God can be properly basic, see Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*.

Reid would not and could not accept Plantinga's Main Argument. De Bary's argument for this conclusion has two main parts. First, he spends nearly three pages arguing that Reid's epistemology is in important respects structurally dissimilar to Plantinga's.[25] I will consider these purported structural dissimilarities in this section. Second, de Bary argues over a dozen pages that while "Reid the clergyman" might find Plantinga's Main Argument appealing, it is not tenable by "Reid the philosopher."[26] I respond to these arguments in section 4. De Bary acknowledges that if he were wrong on both these points—if "the Reid/Plantinga parallel is close enough" and if "Reid could [not] in principle resist the Main Argument again Naturalism"[27]—this "would, of course, imply that Reidian reliabilism, too, carries an ineliminable commitment to God."[28] Or more accurately, it would imply that Reid's reliabilism carries the same commitment to theism as does Plantinga's.

De Bary identifies two purportedly significant structural dissimilarities between Reid's and Plantinga's epistemologies. The first concerns the role of what de Bary calls the Truth Claim; the second, the foundational status of theism.

3.1. The Role of the Truth Claim

According to Reid, the natural operations of our faculties produce various beliefs in us. De Bary calls this the Innateness Claim. Reid further holds that these natural

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[25] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 70–71, 168–169.

[26] Ibid., 179.

[27] Ibid., 171.

[28] Ibid., 168. Even if de Bary is wrong in thinking that these two points imply that Reid's reliabilism carries a commitment to theism similar to Plantinga's, the arguments and textual evidence I provide below strongly support this conclusion.

deliverances of our faculties are generally true. De Bary calls this the Truth Claim.[29] By itself, the Innateness Claim states merely an interesting psychological fact, but this psychological fact becomes epistemically significant when combined with the Truth Claim. De Bary claims that Reid's Truth Claim and Plantinga's fourth condition for warrant are analogous. But according to de Bary, Reid's Truth Claim and Plantinga's fourth condition for warrant occupy different positions and play different roles in their epistemologies. In particular, they are not open to defeaters in the same way. Hence, de Bary concludes that there is a significant structural dissimilarity between Reid's and Plantinga's epistemologies, a dissimilarity relevant to whether theism can play a Plantingian role in Reid's epistemology.

Because I find the logic de Bary's argument confusing and difficult to follow, I will not attempt a detailed reconstruction of it or a step-by-step response to it. Instead, I will challenge the key premise of the argument and show that, whatever the logic of the argument, it is unsound. I will then show that the apparent upshot of the argument does not show that Reid's and Plantinga's epistemologies are significantly different in a relevant respect.

Plantinga's account of warrant contains four conditions. Only if each condition is met will a belief enjoy warrant. According to de Bary, Plantinga's fourth condition "is, in effect, nothing other than what we have been calling Reid's 'Truth Claim.'"[30] The Truth Claim is "Reid's version of Plantinga's condition (4)"; it is "Reid's equivalent of

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[29] Ibid., 65. The passages de Bary cites in support of these claims come from *Inquiry*, II.vi, 33 and *IP*, VI.iv, 466.

[30] Ibid., 167.

condition (4)."[31] The equivalence of Reid's Truth Claim and Plantinga's fourth condition of warrant is a key premise in de Bary's argument that their epistemologies are in important and relevant respects structurally dissimilar. Hence, even if theism is important for Plantinga's epistemology, this does not give one good reason to think theism is similarly important for Reid's.

In response, it is not clear how the Truth Claim and Plantinga's condition (4) are relevantly similar. De Bary puts the Truth Claim as follows: "*The Truth Claim*: First principles generate, if they are not themselves already, true beliefs."[32] De Bary quotes Plantinga's condition 4 as follows: "(4) the design plan is a good one: that is, there is a high statistical or objective probability that . . . [the] . . . belief is true."[33] As quoted, (4) seems fairly similar to the Truth Claim. Roughly, both state that our faculties produce true beliefs. However, this is not what (4) actually claims. In full, Plantinga's condition reads, "(4) the design plan is a good one: that is, there is a high statistical or objective probability that a belief produced in accordance with the relevant segment of the design plan in that sort of environment is true."[34] This is not a claim that our beliefs *are* true, but rather a conditional claim: *if* certain conditions are met, then for any given belief, it will likely be true. Plantinga is basically saying that the designer of our faculties must not have incompetently *aimed* at making faculties whose purpose is the production of true beliefs but failed in this aim. It must be the case that "the design plan is a good one," that

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[31] Ibid., 168.

[32] Ibid., 65.

[33] Ibid., 167. De Bary misplaced the second ellipsis in this quotation. It should come immediately after "belief," not before it: "[the] belief . . . is true."

[34] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 194.

our faculties not only have as their intended purpose the production of true beliefs but that they actually produce true beliefs when everything else is as it should be. In sum, (4) states that "the design plan is a good one," and so *if* the previous three conditions of warrant are met, then most of our beliefs will be true: "(4) *the design plan* [which is aimed at truth—condition (3)] is a good one: that is, there is a high statistical or objective probability that a belief *produced in accordance with the relevant segment of the design plan* [i.e., the faculties are functioning properly, and hence the belief is produced in accordance with the design plan—condition (1)] *in that sort of environment* [i.e., we are in the design environment—condition (2)] is true." (4) states only that warrant requires that "the design plan is a good one," and then proceeds to note that *if* "the design plan is a good one" and the previous conditions of warrant are met, then it is likely our beliefs are generally true. By contrast, the Truth Claim is that our faculties produce true beliefs. *If* the other three conditions of warrant are met, then the Truth Claim would follow from (4). But (4) is not the Truth Claim. So it is not the case that Plantinga's condition (4) "is, in effect, nothing other than what we have been calling Reid's 'Truth Claim.'"

Moreover, Plantinga's account of warrant, along with its conditions, is not primarily about the Truth Claim, or whether our faculties yield true beliefs. It rather concerns that "elusive quality or quantity enough of which, *together with truth and belief*, is sufficient for knowledge."[35] (4) is one condition of *warrant*, and as such it is neither identical with nor does it entail the Truth Claim. It could be that (4) is true—"the design plan is a good one"—but, contra the Truth Claim, one's beliefs are generally false. Perhaps one or more of the other conditions of warrant fails to obtain: perhaps it is false

[35] Ibid., v. Emphasis added.

that "(1) the cognitive faculties involved in the production of *B* are functioning properly," or perhaps it is false that "(2) your cognitive environment is sufficiently similar to the one for which your cognitive faculties were designed," or perhaps it is false that "(3) . . . the design plan governing the production of the belief in question involves, as purpose or function, the production of true beliefs."[36] Likewise, the Truth Claim does not entail (4). Perhaps one's beliefs are generally true, but this is despite the fact that one's design plan is a poor one. Perhaps one's cognitive faculties happen to be malfunctioning in ways that generally counter the problems in one's design plan, and consequently one generally has true beliefs. Two wrongs can reliably make true beliefs even if they cannot make warranted beliefs.

The Truth Claim is *not* "Reid's version of Plantinga's condition (4)." Consequently, de Bary's argument based on this premise is unsound. No significant structural dissimilarity between Reid's and Plantinga's epistemologies follows from de Bary's claim that Reid's Truth Claim is not "'up for defeat' in the same way" as Plantinga's condition (4).[37]

The upshot of de Bary's argument seems to be that it "is going to be very difficult" to persuade Reid that he should give up the Truth Claim:

> Reid takes himself to be entitled to believe the Truth Claim . . . in the absence of good reasons not to believe it. . . . [T]he mere possibility that reliabilism might be false . . . doesn't present a defeater for reliabilism.[38]

This is correct. It is not an objection to point out that a belief *might* be false, for Reid is a fallibilist. But even while granting this, it remains unclear how this indicates any

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[36] Ibid., 194.

[37] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 168.

[38] Ibid., 169.

dissimilarity between Reid and Plantinga. After all, Plantinga's defeater for evolutionary naturalism is not that naturalism allows for the *possibility* that the Truth Claim is false. He acknowledges that possibility on traditional theism while denying that it generates a defeater. De Bary correctly claims that "Reid takes himself to be entitled to believe the Truth Claim . . . unless it can be shown to be false (or in the absence of good reasons not to believe it)."[39] Plantinga would agree with Reid. His point is that he has given naturalists "good reasons not to believe" the Truth Claim.

3.2. The Foundational Status of Theism

According to de Bary, there is an "important reason" for thinking that "despite the close doctrinal parallels between them, Reid's dependence on God is . . . less crucial than Plantinga's."[40] Reid nowhere claims that belief in God is properly basic, but Plantinga defends this view at length in *Warranted Christian Belief*. De Bary briefly argues, "Now it seems fair to say that a system which includes belief in God as foundational must, by definition, exhibit greater reliance on that belief than one, like Reid's, which does not."[41] As a result, Reid's epistemology does not rely on theism in a Plantingian sense.

While de Bary is correct that theism seems to occupy structurally different locations in Reid's and Plantinga's epistemologies, his reasoning from this claim is fallacious. De Bary claims a system in which theism is foundational "must . . . exhibit greater reliance" on theism than a system in which theism is not foundational. This claim admits of two plausible interpretations, but it is false on both.

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[39] Ibid., 169.

[40] Ibid., 70.

[41] Ibid., 71.

First, by "exhibit greater reliance," de Bary may mean, and I think he is most plausibly taken to mean, *structural* reliance: "a system which includes belief in God as foundational must, by definition, exhibit greater *structural* reliance on that belief than one, like Reid's, which does not." Because theism is foundational, more of the superstructure of beliefs must structurally rely on theism. But from the fact that a belief occupies a more foundational location in system A than in system B, it does not follow that system A as a whole exhibits any greater structural reliance on that belief. Perhaps in system A the belief is foundational, but little, if anything, rests upon it. It is lonely and unconnected. In system B, however, the belief is deeply integrated into the structure: while the belief is not foundational, much of the belief system is supported by it in one way or another. For example, as I lean on the arm of my office chair, I have a foundational belief that there is something hard under my elbow. Few, if any, of my other beliefs are supported by this belief, and none of these other beliefs are important to my belief system. But now consider my belief that I am the offspring of the man and woman I know as "father" and "mother." Plausibly, this belief is not foundational, but it is central to who I believe that I am, and many of my beliefs are supported, in one way or degree or another, by this belief. My belief system exhibits much greater structural reliance on this non-foundational belief than it does on the belief that there is something hard under my elbow. So a foundational location does not entail greater structural reliance. It is false that "a system which includes belief in God as foundational must, by definition, exhibit greater *structural* reliance on that belief than one, like Reid's, which does not."

By "exhibit greater reliance," de Bary may alternately mean "reliance" in a non-structural sense. This interpretation has the advantage of making de Bary's claim more

on-target as an objection to the issue at hand, but the claim remains false. De Bary is arguing that "Reid's dependence on God is . . . less crucial than Plantinga's." As concerns the Main Argument, how does Plantinga's epistemology depend on theism? Not in the sense that theism supplies a foundation for a significant part of Plantinga's belief system, and without theism this part of the belief system would lack proper structural support. This may very well be true, but it is not the point of the Main Argument. The point of the Main Argument is that the metaphysical naturalist, *qua* metaphysical naturalist, is impelled toward an undefeatable defeater for any belief she may have. It is not particularly relevant whether her naturalism is foundational or not. By contrast, the theist, *qua* theist, "has nothing impelling him in the direction of such skepticism in the first place." His belief system, unlike the atheist's, is "stable." Insofar as this reflective stability is concerned, it is not particularly relevant whether or not his theism is foundational. As concerns the issue at hand, it is in terms of reflective stability that Plantinga's epistemology relies on theism. Since the Main Argument is concerned with a non-structural reliance on theism, interpreting "exhibit greater reliance" in a non-structural sense makes de Bary's claim more on-target as an objection. But theism's foundational or non-foundational location is not decisive for this non-structural sort of dependence. Regardless of whether her theism is foundational, the theist has a reflective stability not possessed by the naturalist.

As de Bary's title for the section where he makes the above argument shows ("Plantinga's weak non-detachability: God in the foundations"), he mistakenly sees a connection between the foundational status of theism in a system, and that system's need for theism and the stable, non-defeater-generating garden it provides. The fact that theism

is properly basic for Plantinga but apparently not for Reid has no bearing on whether theism is "weakly non-detachable" for Reid in the sense that it is for Plantinga. De Bary has not yet given us a reason to think "Reid's dependence on God is . . . less crucial than Plantinga's."

4. Reid and Plantinga's Main Argument

De Bary notes that Plantinga's Main Argument can be understood as having "two implicit premises": (1) Naturalism generates defeaters that make any belief, and particularly naturalism, irrational. (2) Traditional theism does not generate such defeaters.[42] Following de Bary, I will refer to these as the first and second premises of Plantinga's Main Argument. In "a spirit of thoroughness," de Bary attempts to discern what Reid would say in response to each premise and to Plantinga's defense of each premise.[43] De Bary's key goal is "to show that Reid could in principle resist the Main Argument against Naturalism."[44] He does not, however, spell out what he means by "Reid could in principle resist," making it unclear what is required for him successfully to defend this thesis. At one point he states that Reid "does not have to accept" either premise of the Main Argument. De Bary seems to mean that, given Reid's actual epistemology and the sort of theist he is,[45] he is not thereby committed to either premise.

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[42] Ibid., 171.

[43] Ibid., 177.

[44] Ibid., 171.

[45] The conjunction of these two conditions seems to be a good way of putting the issue. If the question were whether Reid could/must reject the premises given the sort of theist he is, then it would not be informative about his epistemology. If the question were whether he could/must reject the premises considering only his epistemology and not the sort of theist he is, this would either (a) stipulate that his theism is not important to his epistemology by making a sharp division between them, or (b) make it impossible fully to understand the roles that theism can or does play in his epistemology. This is because it

But the conclusions de Bary reaches are significantly stronger. Regarding the first premise, he claims that "we can safely conclude . . . that Reid would say . . . [it] is unsound."[46] And regarding the central claim underlying the second premise, he concludes that "though it might be attractive to Dr Reid in the pulpit, is not [something] on which Professor Reid in his study can rely."[47] In short, Reid would not (and as we will see, could not) accept the first premise, and he could not accept the second premise. According to de Bary, Reid *cannot* accept the Main Argument, given his epistemology and the sort of theist he is.

4.1. The First Premise of the Main Argument

According to the first premise, naturalism generates defeaters that make any belief, and particularly naturalism, irrational. Plantinga argues for this premise as follows. Imagine a population of beings, similar to us, who have come into existence through naturalistic evolution. What is the probability that the cognitive faculties of this population are reliable? Plantinga previously argued that this probability is low. In his Main Argument, however, he starts from a "[s]till more plausible" attitude to take toward this probability: "either the rational attitude to take toward this probability is the judgment that it is low, or the rational attitude is agnosticism with respect to it."[48] Now if we have no other information about the reliability of the imaginary population's faculties apart from these probabilities, then we have "no reason to believe [their cognitive

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would preclude considerations of aspects of his theism that are not part of his epistemology proper but might nonetheless bear importantly upon it.

[46] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 172.

[47] Ibid., 182.

[48] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 231.

faculties are generally reliable] and no reason to disbelieve it. The proposition in question is the sort for which one needs evidence if one is to believe it reasonably; since there is no evidence the reasonable course is to withhold belief."[49] But then we can apply the same reasoning to ourselves: "[T]he devotee of [naturalistic evolution] has a defeater for any belief *B* he holds. Now the next thing to note is that *B might be [naturalistic evolution] itself*."[50]

De Bary objects:

> Now it's surely clear that Reid not only could but assuredly *would* resist Plantinga's key move in this argument. . . . [Plantinga's key move] is a quite un-Reidian, or even anti-Reidian, thing to do. According to Reid's metaposition, [the general reliability of our cognitive faculties] (or, if we prefer, the Truth Claim) is precisely *not* the sort of proposition 'for which one needs evidence if one is to believe it reasonably.' . . . Reid would not regard [Plantinga's argument] as capable of presenting a calamitous defeater for the Truth Claim—Plantinga's first premise, he would say, is unsound.[51]

De Bary is correct that for Reid, the Truth Claim is not something "for which one needs evidence if one is to believe it reasonably."[52] As a principle of common sense, we can non-inferentially and justifiably believe it. But Plantinga's argument is not that, absent evidence for the Truth Claim, it is unreasonable to believe it. As we have seen, Plantinga allows that the evolutionary naturalist might reasonably trust his faculties, *so long as he does not encounter the Main Argument or reflect too deeply on his own*. Plantinga's

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[49] Ibid., 229.

[50] Ibid., 231.

[51] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 172. In the final sentence, my insertion of "Plantinga's argument" replaces "Darwin's Doubt." I performed this substitution because Plantinga's argument for this premise is not based on Darwin's Doubt. It is rather based on a disjunction, and one of the disjuncts is Darwin's Doubt: "either the rational attitude to take toward this probability is the judgment that it is low [i.e., Darwin's Doubt], or the rational attitude is agnosticism with respect to it" (Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 231). As I argue below, while de Bary is correct that Plantinga's argument from this disjunction does not present a defeater for Reid, Darwin's Doubt can present a defeater.

[52] More precisely, the Truth Claim is not something for which one needs *reflective* evidence. See my discussion of evidence in chapter 7.

argument is that *if one has a defeater for the Truth Claim*, as he believes evolutionary naturalists reading his book do, *then* it is "the sort of proposition 'for which one needs evidence if one is to believe it reasonably.'" So if Plantinga's defeater argument for the Truth Claim is a "good reason [for the naturalist] not to believe it," then it follows that Reid would accept the first premise of the Main Argument. Contra de Bary, Plantinga's basic move is Reidian: it is a move that, given Reid's epistemology and the sort of theist he is, Reid would, or at least should, accept.

The question remains as to whether Reid could or would accept Plantinga's defeater argument as a "good reason" for the naturalist not to accept the Truth Claim. De Bary acknowledges that for Reid the Truth Claim can be defeated: "Reid takes himself to be entitled to believe the Truth Claim (in the same way as any lower-order belief) unless it can be shown to be false (or in the absence of good reasons not to believe it)."[53] However, Lehrer and Warner, in their discussion of Reid and Plantinga's Main Argument, deny that for Reid there can be any defeater for (what we are calling) the Truth Claim.[54] Thus, to show that Reid might accept Plantinga's first premise, I need to establish both a) that for Reid it is possible for the Truth Claim to be defeated, contra Lehrer and Warner, and b) that Reid could or would accept Plantinga's defeater argument as a "good reason" for the naturalist not to accept the Truth Claim, contra de Bary.

4.1.1. Can the Truth Claim be defeated? Lehrer and Warner deny that theism plays a Plantingian role in Reid's epistemology, and claim that "[t]here is . . . a reply to

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[53] Ibid., 169.

[54] Lehrer and Warner, "Reid, God and Epistemology," 369–370.

Plantinga's argument contained in Reid's philosophy."[55] This reply is that for Reid it is impossible to defeat the belief that our faculties are in general reliable. That is, it is impossible to provide a defeater for Reid's seventh first principle of contingent truths: "Another first principle is, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious."[56] Following Lehrer's common way of referring to this principle, Lehrer and Warner call it the "first first principle." This name is based on the fact that according to Reid this principle enjoys a certain priority among first principles: "If any truth can be said to be prior to all others in the order of nature, this seems to have the best claim; because in every instance of assent, whether upon intuitive, demonstrative, or probable evidence, the truth of our faculties is taken for granted, and is, as it were, one of the premises on which our assent is grounded."[57]

Against Plantinga's Main Argument, Lehrer and Warner claim that "Reid rejects the idea that we could have any global defeater, an undefeated defeater of R [i.e., the claim that our faculties are reliable] or the first first principle. That principle is beyond defeat."[58] They provide two philosophical arguments in support of this claim.

Here is Lehrer and Warner's first argument:

> In short, the theory of evolution might by itself lead us to have doubts about the trustworthiness of our faculties, but those doubts cannot be sustained. For, the reasoning by which we have arrived at the acceptance of the theory of evolution assumes the trustworthiness of those very faculties. Thus, the theory of evolution

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[55] Ibid., 367.

[56] Reid, *IP*, VI.v, 480.

[57] Ibid., VI.v, 481.

[58] Lehrer and Warner, "Reid, God and Epistemology," 369–370.

> in conjunction with the first first principle cannot sustain doubts about the trustworthiness of our faculties.[59]

Lehrer and Warner's argument seems to be that because the first first principle is presupposed whenever we use our faculties, we cannot through the use of our faculties conclude that the first first principle is false. For our acceptance of whatever we are reasoning about—in this case, evolution—requires our acceptance of the first first principle, at least in practice.

In response, I am not sure how this argument shows that the naturalist cannot have a defeater for the first first principle. It is true that the evolutionary naturalist will have to assume his faculties are reliable in order to arrive at the conclusion that his faculties are probably not reliable. But, assuming his reasoning is good, this merely shows that the evolutionary naturalist's starting point was problematic. He was either believing or assuming the truth of naturalism, evolution, and the first first principle, and through reflection he has come to see that this is a highly improbable triad and generates a global defeater. If he is going to remain an evolutionary naturalist, this means he has only one option: give up the first first principle. But, as Plantinga points out, this in turn undermines the rationality of accepting naturalism and accepting evolution. Even though the naturalist presupposes his faculties are reliable, his evolutionary naturalism generates a defeater for this presupposition.

Lehrer and Warner's second argument is a reply to Plantinga's argument that the probability of our faculties being reliable (R) given naturalism (N) and evolution (E) and the sort of cognitive faculties we have (C) is low or inscrutable. They argue that in response to Plantinga, Reid

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[59] Ibid., 367–368.

> can consistently argue that R/(N&E&C) = 1 because the probability of R itself is 1. The first first principle has the highest probability and is, in that way, certain. The equality cited results from the certainty of R and the first first principle by the following argument from probability: If the probability of R is 1, then the probability of R&N&E&C is equal to the probability of N&E&C. By the definition of conditional probability, R/(N&E&C) is equal to the ratio of the probability of R&N&E&C to the probability of N&E&C. Thus, the probability of R/(N&E&C) is 1.[60]

Plantinga has argued that R cannot itself be a defeater-deflector for putative defeaters of itself.[61] Setting this issue aside, Lehrer and Warner are correct that if for Reid R is utterly certain and has a probability of 1, then it cannot be defeated.[62] If the probability of R = 1, then the probability of R given x = 1 (provided x does not entail ~R). And since N&E&C does not entail ~R, the probability of R given N&E&C remains 1.

But are Lehrer and Warner correct that according to Reid the probability of R = 1, and hence that R cannot be defeated? They give two reasons for this claim. First, "The certainty of first principles is the result of their self-evident truth. . . . In brief, the same feature that precludes proving the truth of the first first principle precludes the defeat of it, namely, that it is certain and self-evident in itself."[63] In response, according to Reid

> it is not impossible, that what is only a vulgar prejudice may be mistaken for a first principle. Nor is it impossible, that what is really a first principle may, by the enchantment of words, have such a mist thrown about it, as to hide its evidence, and to make a man of candour doubt of it. Such cases happen more frequently perhaps in this science [i.e., "of the mind and its faculties"] than in any other.[64]

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[60] Ibid., 368.

[61] See Plantinga's discussion of "the conditionalization problem" in Alvin Plantinga, "Reply to Beilby's Cohorts," in *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*, ed. James Beilby (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 220–225.

[62] They are mistaken, however, in their claim that if "[t]he first first principle has the highest probability," then it "is, in that way, certain." Reid is a fallibilist, and on fallibilism something can have the highest probability and yet not be certain.

[63] Lehrer and Warner, "Reid, God and Epistemology," 368.

[64] Reid, *IP*, I.ii, 41. Emphasis added.

From the fact that the first first principle is a self-evident principle of common sense, it does not follow that it enjoys absolute certainty and is undefeatable. Even a "man of candour" may doubt a self-evident principle. Moreover, a principle of common sense, and particularly a contingent principle of common sense, such as the first first principle, is not "self-evident *in itself*." It is only self-evident to certain people in certain circumstances. Its self-evidence for any given person in any given situation is not a given.

Lehrer and Warner give a second argument that Reid would assign a probability of 1 to R. This argument is based on a unique feature of R, not a generic feature that R shares with other self-evident principles:

> [T]he reason for assigning a probability of one to the first principle in probabilistic reasoning is not difficult to extrapolate from what Reid says about the relationship of the principle to reasoning in general. All our reasoning, probabilistic reasoning included, presupposes that our faculties are trustworthy and not fallacious. Nothing can be more probable than that presupposition of all reasoning, including reasoning about probabilities. The principle admits of neither proof nor refutation, for all reasoning presupposes the self-evident truth of it.[65]

I am not sure what Lehrer and Warner mean by the claim that "all reasoning presupposes the *self-evident* truth of" the first first principle. Doubtlessly all reasoning presupposes the reliability of our faculties (or at least, the reliability of reason), but it does not presuppose the *self-evident* reliability of our faculties. But what about their claim that "nothing can be more probable than that presupposition of all reasoning, including reasoning about probabilities"? Does the fact that the reliability of our faculties (or at least reason) is presupposed in all reasoning make the reliability of our faculties (or at least reason) maximally probable? Well, the simple *fact that* I am presupposing something in all my reasoning does not mean that I will find it maximally probable if or

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[65] Lehrer and Warner, "Reid, God and Epistemology," 369.

when I contemplate it. Perhaps the idea is that if I *realize* I am presupposing the reliability of my faculties in all my reasoning, then the reliability of my faculties will be maximally probable for me. But this does not seem to follow. Upon having such a realization I would, of course, see that in practice I am deeply committed to the reliability of my faculties. But it does not follow that now I am aware of this unreflective practical commitment I will or must rationally endorse it, much less by assigning a probability of 1 to the reliability of my faculties.

We and Lehrer and Warner have strayed from anything clearly in Reid's writings. Let us see what Reid himself might say about the claim that "Reid rejects the idea that we could have any global defeater, an undefeated defeater of R or the first first principle." Lehrer and Warner's support of this claim is primarily philosophical, not textual. But there exists strong textual evidence that Reid did not reject the possibility of someone having a defeater for R. Indeed, Reid claims that the *theist*, if he has the wrong theology, can have a defeater for the belief that his faculties are reliable. In the *Active Powers*, Reid writes,

> Some of the most strenuous advocates for the doctrine of necessity acknowledge that it is impossible to act upon it. They say that we have a natural sense or conviction that we act freely, but that this is a fallacious sense.
>
> This doctrine is dishonourable to our Maker, and lays a foundation for universal scepticism. . . .
>
> If any one of our natural faculties be fallacious, there can be no reason to trust . . . any of them; for he that made one made all.
>
> Passing this opinion, therefore, as shocking to an ingenuous mind, and, in its consequences, subversive of all religion, all morals and all knowledge, let us proceed.[66]

According to Reid, if a theist were mistakenly to hold to the "doctrine of necessity" and believe God has given us a fallacious sense, this would lay "a foundation for universal

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[66] Reid, *AP*, IV.vi, 228–229. For a similar claim, see *IP*, II.xxii, 244.

scepticism" and be subversive of "all knowledge." It would do this by providing a defeater for R: "If any one of our natural faculties be fallacious, there can be no reason to trust to any of them." Of course, Reid thinks the proper response when faced with such a defeater is to abandon the false piece of theology generating it: God has not given us a fallacious faculty. Reid would probably likewise counsel the naturalist who encountered Plantinga's Main Argument to abandon his naturalism, which is the same advice Plantinga offers. Reid nonetheless thinks it is possible to have a defeater for the claim that our faculties are reliable. If one does believe God has given us a fallacious faculty, one has a defeater for the Truth Claim. Likewise, Reid would claim, if one is a naturalist and Plantinga's Main Argument supplies a good reason to think one's faculties are not reliable, one has a defeater for the Truth Claim. In principle, the Main Argument could give the naturalist a global defeater. But does it?

4.1.2. Does Plantinga give the naturalist a defeater for the Truth Claim? As we saw in chapter 4, Reid clearly thinks that for something to be a defeater, it needs to be "shewn" to be the case. The mere possibility that a belief may be mistaken is not an objection to it.[67] Reid thinks an inductive argument can constitute a defeater for the Truth Claim, and thus "lay a foundation for universal scepticism." In the *Intellectual Powers* he writes that if we have "reason to think that God has given fallacious powers to *any* of his creatures," this "would lay a foundation for *universal* scepticism" for *us*.[68] The premise is not that God has given fallacious powers to *us*, but that he has given fallacious powers to some of his creatures. Yet the upshot is that *our* trust in *our* faculties is defeated; it lays a

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[67] Reid, *IP*, VI.iv, 465–466; I.ii, 46–47.

[68] Ibid., II.xxii, 244. Emphasis added.

foundation for "universal skepticism." In the previously quoted passage from the *Active Powers*, Reid similarly remarks, "If any one of our natural faculties be fallacious, there can be no reason to trust any of them; for he that made one made all." Furthermore, "This doctrine . . . lays a foundation for universal scepticism," and "in its consequences, [is] subversive of all religion, all morals and all knowledge."[69]

Clearly, a deductive proof is not required for a defeater for the Truth Claim. If we are "shewn" we have an undefeated defeater for the Truth Claim, this "lays a foundation for universal scepticism." This is not, of course, to say that we then would or could give up our natural, instinctive belief in the reliability of our faculties. It is rather that this would "shake" our "natural sentiments," for we would be aware that we could not rationally endorse them.[70]

Does Plantinga present a defeater for the naturalist that is on par with the defeaters Reid considers for the theist? Plantinga's defeater argument is based on a disjunction, which makes the premise "[s]till more plausible." The disjunction is that for the naturalist, "either the rational attitude to take toward this probability [of our faculties being reliable given naturalism and evolution] is the judgment that it is low, or the rational attitude is agnosticism with respect to it."

While Reid might agree that this should make the naturalist somewhat tentative in accepting the Truth Claim, I doubt he would consider it a defeater. The reason is that Plantinga's argument does not give the naturalist good reason to think her faculties actually *are* fallacious, but only that she doesn't have a good reason to believe they are

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[69] Reid, *AP*, IV.vi, 228–229.

[70] Ibid., IV.xi, 268. Plantinga makes a similar point in *Warrant and Proper Function*, 231.

veridical. In the absence of a good reason to think her faculties actually *are* fallacious, it is not irrational for the naturalist to accept their deliverances. For Reid, a defeater must give us "reason to think that God [or in this case, naturalistic evolution] *has given* fallacious powers." If the probability of our faculties being reliable given evolutionary naturalism is "low or inscrutable," this is not a defeater. To be a defeater, the probability would have to be low.

So Reid would not accept Plantinga's above argument for the first premise of the Main Argument. Plantinga's argument does not show that naturalism generates global defeaters. But note that Plantinga's argument is based on the "still more plausible" disjunction. The argument could be based on the less plausible single disjunct that the probability of the Truth Claim on naturalistic evolution is *low*. While the disjunction is *more* plausible, Plantinga argues this single disjunct is still plausible. Indeed, Plantinga uses this version of the defeater argument in his most recent presentation of his argument against naturalism: "the conditional probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable, given naturalism together with the proposition that we have come to be by way of evolution, is low."[71] This revised argument *does* present a defeater on par with what Reid thinks is needed to "shake" our trust in our faculties: it gives "reason to think that [naturalistic evolution] *has given* fallacious powers." Insofar as this revised argument gives the evolutionary naturalist good reason to think she has fallacious cognitive faculties, it lays for her "a foundation for universal scepticism." When the first premise of Plantinga's Main Argument is based on this revised argument, Reid can and should accept it. Contra de Bary, Plantinga's revised move is Reidian.

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[71] Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, chapter 10.

4.2. The Second Premise of the Main Argument

According to the first premise, evolutionary naturalism gives its adherents a defeater similar to that which the theist would have *if* he had good "reason to think that God has given fallacious powers." But according to the second premise,

> [T]he theist has nothing impelling him in the direction of such skepticism in the first place; . . . there are no propositions he already accepts just by way of being a theist, which together with forms of reasoning (the defeater system, for example) lead to the rejection of the belief that our cognitive faculties have the apprehension of truth as their purpose and for the most part fulfill that purpose.[72]

Significantly, Plantinga does not claim that simply being a theist places one in the above epistemic situation. Theism provides this favorable epistemic environment only via the doctrine of the *imago Dei*:

> The traditional theist . . . isn't forced into this appalling loop. On this point his set of beliefs is stable. . . . [*Q*]*ua* traditional theist—*qua* Jewish, Moslem, or Christian theist—he believes that God is the premier knower and has created us human beings in his image, an important part of which involves his endowing them with a reflection of his powers as a knower.[73]

As Plantinga concedes, "Things may stand differently with a *bare* theist—one who holds only that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good creator, but does not add that God has created humankind in his own image."[74]

De Bary's attack comes right at this point: "So the question whether Reid would endorse this second premise of Plantinga's reduces to the question whether he, like most theists then and now, is an 'image of God' man, or whether his theism is of the scarcer

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[72] Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 237.

[73] Ibid., 236.

[74] Ibid., 236 note 25. Emphasis in the original.

'bare' variety."[75] According to de Bary, he "can find only one passage which looks even vaguely relevant to the specific issue," and as he notes, "the passage is indecisive for the present question. To make progress," he concludes, "we need to enlist some specialist help."[76] De Bary enlists Edward Craig's study of the doctrine of the image of God,[77] and uses it to argue over ten pages to the conclusion that "in principle [Reid] may have doubts about the reliability of the faculties parallel to those of a non-theist."[78]

The argument is speculative and at best inconclusive. According to de Bary, Craig identifies two parts of the image of God doctrine: "that man resembles God (a) in point of reason . . . , and (b) in point of moral values." De Bary considers whether Reid would agree with both points. As regards whether "man resembles God in point of reason," de Bary claims we are again faced with "textual inconclusiveness." After returning to Craig to identify three beliefs which "typically accompan[y] the image of God doctrine," he argues that each of them "flows in a counter-Reidian direction," and thus that "Reid . . . definitely doesn't subscribe to" the idea that we resemble God in our reasoning.[79] Clearly, there is nothing "definite" about this conclusion. De Bary next considers whether Reid would adopt the second part of the image of God doctrine: "we want to see whether a notorious remnant of Cartesianism, which still does crucial work for Plantinga and other 'traditional' theists, does any work for Reid too."[80] De Bary acknowledges that

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[75] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 172.

[76] Ibid., 172, 173.

[77] Edward Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

[78] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 182.

[79] Ibid., 173–177.

[80] Ibid., 177.

"Reid *does* believe we resemble God in points of moral values," but he argues this is unproblematic:

> On the face of it, these unambiguous expressions of what Craig calls the 'unthinkable assumption that God's ways are our ways' might seem to prepare Reid to draw from it the 'product', so important to Descartes, that 'God is no deceiver'. Such a result would not only be a considerable embarrassment for our interpretation of Reid throughout this study. It would also be impossible, on *any* interpretation, to reconcile with those passages (admittedly few in number) which strongly suggest that Reid regards God's veracity as a genuinely open question. But in fact it is not hard to find a consistent position for Reid here. He can hold both that our moral ways are God's moral ways, and that God might sometimes deceive us, simply by pointing out the fact that our (estimable) moral ways include paternalistic deception. . . . Analogously, so Reid could say, our being 'deceived by him that made us' does not at all compromise (and might even sometimes be dictated by) the 'disinterested goodness and rectitude' of our maker.[81]

The upshot is that the belief "God is no deceiver" "is a belief which, though it might be attractive to Dr Reid in the pulpit, is not one on which Professor Reid in his study can rely."[82] Reid is not an "image of God man" in the relevant sense, and he must reject Plantinga's second premise.

Similar to de Bary, James Somerville claims that "Reid has not ruled out . . . the very possibility of divine deception, by arguing like Descartes that God could, or would, never be deceptive."[83] Also like de Bary, Somerville claims Reid allows for the possibility of paternalistic deception by God: "Reid does not entirely rule out such a possibility" according to which "God might deceive us for our own good."[84]

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[81] Ibid., 178. De Bary makes similar statements about the possibility of divine paternalistic deception on pages 70 and 169.

[82] Ibid., 182.

[83] Somerville, *The Enigmatic Parting Shot*, 357.

[84] Ibid., 354.

Fortunately, we do not need to look in detail at de Bary's above ten-page argument in order thoroughly to discredit it and show that Reid does and in principle must accept the second premise of the Main Argument. First, while de Bary can find only one inconclusive passage about whether Reid is an "image of God man," this does not mean no such passages exist. Consider the following *representative* passages from the *Active Powers*:

> [Is God] not pleased with this image of himself in his creatures, and displeased with the contrary?
>
> [S]urely *there can be no real knowledge or real excellence in man, which is not in his Maker*.
>
> We may therefore justly conclude, That what we know in part, and see in part, of right and wrong, he sees perfectly; that the moral excellence which we see and admire in some of our fellow-creatures, is a faint but true copy of that moral excellence, which is essential to his nature.[85]

Clearly, Reid is some sort of an "image of God man."

De Bary and Somerville, however, raise an even more specific objection. A key part of the move from traditional theism to the second premise of the Main Argument is the "notorious remnant of Cartesianism" that "God is no deceiver." De Bary argues, on the basis of the possibility of "estimable" paternalistic deception, that this Cartesian belief "is not one on which Professor Reid . . . can rely": "our being 'deceived by him that made us' does not at all compromise (and might even sometimes be dictated by) the 'disinterested goodness and rectitude' of our maker."[86] Plantinga's traditional theism and its acceptance of the *imago Dei* is not enough to avoid skeptical worries analogous to

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[85] Reid, *AP*, IV.xi, 263; V.vii, 362–363, emphasis added. See also *AP*, III.pt 2.iv, 120; III.pt 3.iv, 166; IV.xi, 265.

[86] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 178.

those generated by naturalism: the traditional theist must also deny "estimable" paternalistic deception on God's part.

In support of his thesis that "Reid regards God's veracity as a genuinely open question," de Bary cites two passages from the *Inquiry*. As he acknowledges, each passage at most "strongly suggests" his thesis, and he works one passage "quite hard."[87] The one supporting passage Somerville cites is the same passage de Bary works "quite hard."[88] The textual evidence is by no means conclusive.

By contrast, there is clear textual evidence that Reid does not consider God's veracity "a genuinely open question." The character of God, according to Reid, gives us "certain knowledge" that God "will always be true in all his declarations, faithful in all his promises."[89] In another passage, Reid states that "veracity," like goodness, is one of God's "essential attributes."[90]

Reid does not merely think God is no deceiver. In the *Active Powers*, he clearly rejects the possibility of divine paternalistic deception, contra de Bary's assertion that "Reid does not, at least in his published writings, directly discuss the possibility that God might deceive us for our own good."[91]

> The defenders of necessity, to reconcile it to the principles of Theism, find themselves obliged to give up all the moral attributes of God, excepting that of goodness, or a desire to produce happiness. . . . Justice, *veracity*, faithfulness, are only modifications of goodness, the means of promoting its purposes, and are exercised only so far as they serve that end. . . .

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[87] Ibid., 178; 189 note 9; 68. The passages come from *Inquiry*, V.vii, 72, and VI.xx, 169.

[88] Somerville, *The Enigmatic Parting Shot*, 357.

[89] Reid, *AP*, IV.xi, 258.

[90] Ibid., IV.xi, 263.

[91] De Bary, *Reid and Scepticism*, 178.

> If other moral evils may be attributed to the Deity as the means of promoting general good, why may not false declarations and false promises? And then what grounds have we left to believe the truth of what he reveals, or to rely upon what he promises?[92]

It is here we see that Reid is in principle committed to denying divine paternalist deception:

> The genuine dictate of our natural faculties is the voice of God, no less than what he reveals from heaven; and to say that it is fallacious is to impute a lie to the God of truth.
>
> If candor and veracity be not an essential part of moral excellence, there is no . . . reason to rely on the declarations and promises of the Almighty. . . .
>
> Passing this opinion, therefore, as shocking to an ingenuous mind, and, in its consequences, *subversive* of all religion, all morals and *all knowledge*, let us proceed.[93]

If divine paternalistic deception is a "genuinely open question," we lose the "grounds . . . to believe the truth of what [God] reveals." But the "genuine dictate of our natural faculties is the voice of God, no less than what he reveals from heaven"; so if one accepts divine paternalistic deception as a live possibility, "there is no . . . reason to rely on" our faculties.[94] And this is "subversive of . . . all knowledge." Reid is committed to the claim that God is no deceiver,[95] and he realizes that without it he is open to a defeater for what de Bary calls the Truth Claim. Contra de Bary, the belief that God is no deceiver *is* one to which Reid is committed, and it is one "on which Professor Reid in his study can rely." Consequently, it is not the case that "in principle he may have doubts about the reliability

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[92] Reid, *AP*, IV.xi, 262, 263. Emphasis added.

[93] Ibid., IV.vi, 229. Emphasis added.

[94] Reid's claim on this point is too strong. Surely God occasionally allowing or causing some false beliefs for our good does not undermine all our reason for trusting the deliverances of our faculties. So long as God does not allow or produce such false beliefs too frequently, it remains the case that any given belief is probably true because it is God-given, and this gives us a (defeasible) reason to rely on our faculties.

[95] At least in the sense that God would not give us faculties which, in their "genuine dictate," are fallacious.

of the faculties parallel to those of a non-theist." Reid is committed to the second premise of the Main Argument.

According to the first premise of Plantinga's Main Argument, naturalistic evolution generates a global defeater for its adherents. I have argued Reid can and should accept this premise when it is based on the most recent version of Plantinga's argument for it, according to which the probability of our faculties being reliable given naturalism is *low*. Based on Reid's discussion of what would count as theistic defeaters for the Truth Claim and "lay a foundation for universal scepticism," I argued this modified version of Plantinga's argument would similarly present a defeater for the naturalist. If Plantinga has, as he claims, shown the probability of our faculties being reliable on naturalism is low, then Reid can and should accept the first premise. According to the second premise of the Main Argument, theism does not generate global defeaters. De Bary's argument that Reid would reject the second premise is plagued by inaccurate and incomplete readings of Reid's texts. I have shown that Reid is in principle committed to the second premise. In summary, there is good reason to think that Reid could and plausibly should and would accept Plantinga's Main Argument, and not only in his pulpit, but in his study.

5. Did Reid Think His Epistemology Flourishes Best in the Garden of Theism?

A passage from Reid's *Active Powers* suggests Reid may in fact have held a position very similar to Plantinga's: Reid not only could and should but *did* think his epistemology flourishes best in the garden of theism.

After discussing the two leading and rational principles of action, Reid considers the following question: "As these are, therefore, two regulating or leading principles in the constitution of man, a regard to what is best for us upon the whole, and a regard to

duty, it may be asked, Which of these ought to yield if they happen to interfere?"[96] The question is not merely or primarily about which principle we ought to yield to if they conflict in a particular situation. It is rather about what we should do if these two principles are fundamentally in conflict. What if we are in the miserable position of having principles of our constitution that are fundamentally opposed? In such a case, at least one of them would have to be generally misdirected and fallacious. Reid responds:

> Juster views of human nature will teach us to avoid both these extremes [of claiming that we should deny one or the other of our leading principles]. . . .
>
> [T]here is no active principle which God hath planted in our nature that is vicious in itself, or that ought to be eradicated, even if it were in our power. . . .
>
> As to the supposition of an opposition between the two governing principles, . . . this supposition is merely imaginary. There can be no such opposition.[97]

Reid's response is to deny that we do or could face any such dilemma. The basis of Reid's confident stance is explicitly theistic: God has not given us any active principles that are vicious in themselves or that we should reject. More generally, God has not given us fundamentally conflicting principles, at least one of which would then have to be fallacious. Clearly, Reid's response to this problem is theistic. But does it have to be? Can the atheist, *qua* atheist, confidently assert, "There can be no such opposition"? Reid continues:

> While the world is under a wise and benevolent administration, it is impossible, that any man should, in the issue, be a loser by doing his duty. Every man, therefore, who believes in God, while he is careful to do his duty, may safely leave the care of his happiness to him who made him. He is conscious that he consults the last most effectually by attending to the first.
>
> Indeed, if we suppose a man to be an atheist in his belief, and, at the same time, by wrong judgment, to believe that virtue is contrary to his happiness upon the whole, this case, as Lord Shaftesbury justly observes, is without remedy. It will be impossible for the man to act, so as not to contradict a leading principle of

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[96] Reid, *AP*, III.pt 3.viii, 193.

[97] Ibid., III.pt 3.viii, 194.

> his nature. He must either sacrifice his happiness to virtue, or virtue to happiness; and is reduced to this miserable dilemma, whether it be best to be a fool or a knave.
>
> This shews the strong connection between morality and the principles of natural religion; as the last only can secure a man from the possibility of an apprehension, that he may play the fool by doing his duty.
>
> Hence, even Lord Shaftesbury . . . concludes, *That virtue without piety is incomplete*. Without piety, it loses . . . its firmest support.[98]

The atheist may not believe his leading principles of action are opposed. But according to Reid, the atheist cannot be secure in this epistemic position, for "only [theism] can secure a man from the possibility of an apprehension, that he may play the fool by doing his duty." According to Reid, his confident denial of the dilemma under consideration not only is but must be set within a theistic garden.

The first premise of Plantinga's Main Argument is in effect the claim that atheism supplies a premise for a piece of good reasoning which concludes that it is unlikely our faculties are reliable. Reid does not here similarly go so far as claiming the atheist is pushed toward a defeater *by his atheism*, though he does leave that possibility open. He says merely that atheism does not protect the atheist from the dreaded apprehension, and "*only* [theism] can secure a man from the possibility" of such an apprehension. So this passage is not quite an exact parallel of Plantinga's Main Argument. But it does support the claim that Reid, like Plantinga, thinks his epistemology flourishes best in the garden of theism.

According to Reid, atheism, unlike theism, leaves one open to certain kinds of skeptical worries and defeaters, including worries about the reliability of one's faculties. Reid does not further claim, as Plantinga does, that atheism, unlike theism, *generates*

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[98] Ibid. While I do not deny that Reid frequently notes the importance of theism to moral motivation, the passages quoted here are primarily concerned with moral *epistemology*: can we know these two principles are not opposed? These passages therefore have direct relevance to the role of theism in Reid's epistemology more generally.

skeptical worries and defeaters, including worries about the reliability of one's faculties.[99] Put differently, in Reid's epistemology theism provides the same epistemic security as it does in Plantinga's, but atheism does not present the same epistemic liabilities. However, atheism still does not provide the epistemic security of theism. This is because even if atheism does not generate epistemic incongruities or defeaters, it does not provide deep coherence. It does not afford an overarching, comprehensive worldview from which one can *see* that his faculties are reliable and his epistemic situation is favorable. Without this favorable meta-perspective on himself as a knower and his epistemic situation, the atheist lacks Reidian *scientia* and the numerous epistemic goods that come with it.

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[99] Or at least, I have been unable to find a passage where Reid makes such a claim.

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