The Nature of Thomas Reid's Common Sense Philosophy

Dissertation

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Contents

Abbreviations

Primary Works

C	Reid, T. (2003). *The Correspondence of Thomas Reid*. Ed. by P. Wood. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
EAP	Reid, T. (2010). *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*. Ed. by K. Haakonssen and J. A. Harris. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
EIP	Reid, T. (2002). *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Ed. by D. R. Brookes and K. Haakonssen. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
IHM	Reid, T. (1997). *An Inquiry Into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense: A Critical Edition*. Ed. by D. R. Brookes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
OP	Reid, T. (2001). "Of Power". In: *Philosophical Quarterly* 51.202, pp. 1–12.

Secondary Works

EHU	Locke, J. (1975). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding: Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke*. Ed. by P.H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press UK.
Enquiry	Hume, D. (1748). *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. by A. Merivale and P. Millican. Hume Texts [Online]. URL: https://davidhume.org/texts/e.
OC	Wittgenstein, L. (1969). *On Certainty*. Ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
PH	Sextus Empiricus (2000). *Outlines of Scepticism*. Ed. by J. Annas and J. Barnes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Principia	Newton, I. (1999). *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. Ed. by B. I. Cohen and A. Whitman. Berkeley, London, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
Proof	Moore, G. E. (1993). "Proof of an External World". In: *G. E. Moore: Selected Writings*. Ed. by T. Baldwin. London: Routledge.
T	Hume, D. (1739). *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Ed. by A. Merivale and P. Millican. Hume Texts [Online]. URL: https://davidhume.org/texts/t/.

Foreword

The initial interest in Thomas Reid and common sense originated from my misgivings with contemporary analytic metaphysics and the dismissal of some theories as false, on the ground that it would contradict common sense. Neither did proponents of such a move continued to point towards any premise to be falsified, nor did they explain how this appeal worked or why it could be used justifiably in a discipline as obscure as contemporary metaphysics – not to mention the fact that the appeal to common sense seemed to be restricted to metaphysics and was nowhere to be seen in the fields of politics, ethics, or the respective philosophies thereof.

In tracing the notion of common sense through its philosophical history, I did of course stumble upon Moore and Wittgenstein, who do make their appearances in this work, but didn't satisfy me, because they didn't seem to supply a notion of common sense that was suited for the role it played in contemporary metaphysics – Moore, because he seemed to be merely a historic instance of the behaviour I wanted to understand, and Wittgenstein, because his notions of *Weltbild* and *Mythologie* seemed a little too esoteric at the time, and because I didn't want to ascribe Wittgensteinian theses to proponents of the appeal to common sense. It wasn't neutral enough to explain how this appeal did work.

From there I came to Thomas Reid, an event which coincided with the end of my graduate studies. And so I took up to investigate Reid's notion of common sense within my dissertation. For the first two years, I worked within the broader orthodoxy of Reid being an epistemologist, investigating the relationship between epistemic first principles, suited to guide us to metaphysical first principles, which in turn guarantee the epistemic first principles to guide us. In effect, I played around with the ideas of an analytic and a synthetic reading of Reid, but in the end, the text always stood in the way of these efforts. Within my fellowship at the *Maimonides Centre for*

Advanced Studies, and in virtue of the additional time this brought with it, I had the opportunity to reorient, and, just as Reid did with the way of ideas, to question the underlying premise of most of the scholarship produced: that Reid is rejecting the sceptic by means of an epistemology based on, or identified with, the first principles of common sense. The following is the result of a fresh look at Reid, to weigh the evidence as unbiased as it was possible for me, to find out whether this underlying premise is true or false, and to hint at how a new interpretation of Reid would look like if this underlying premise is indeed false.

I thank my supervisor Stephan Schmid for the prolonged guidance in these last five years, as well as his general support, be it with regard to the fellowship at MCAS, or to my year-long parental leave in the middle of my contract. I am deeply thankful to my family for bearing with me this whole time, for reading drafts over drafts, and for being there whenever I needed them. Finally, I want to thank my friend Frederick Beuchling for his comments on a final draft, and Rolf Eggersglüß, my best student, for many valuable comments both with regard to drafts and, over the span of many semesters, in the classroom.

Chapter 1

Introduction

> It is so difficult to find the beginning. Or better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not to try to go further back.
>
> Wittgenstein, On Certainty, 471

This dissertation is about Thomas Reid and the place and nature of common sense within his published writings. As will emerge shortly, I think that common sense - due to its connection to belief-formation - has a central place in Reid's project. Given the nature of common sense, that project can't be situated within epistemology. Reid's project is best understood as located at the intersection of psychology and the philosophy of mind - a discipline we can call descriptive psychology.[1] The difference is best brought out in saying that on the epistemological reading, Reid is telling us what we should believe, whereas Reid the descriptive psychologist only describes what we in fact believe, thereby suspending any normative judgement. In line with this re-evaluation, Reid's place in the history of philosophy is much closer to his contemporary David Hume[2] and to the very late Wittgenstein

[1] The term 'descriptive psychology' means something different in psychology than in philosophy, cf. Ossorio (1983/1985). Here, by that term I refer to the philosophical meaning, i.e., a project in which we inquire into the existence and adequate description of mental operations, faculties, states etc., as well as their various interrelations, dependencies and so on. The term is coined by Brentano (a course of lectures in 1887/88 was entitled 'Deskriptive Psychologie', cf. Brentano (1982: ix)).

[2] The literature on Hume contains interpretations of him as a naturalist (cf. Loeb 2002, Stroud 2000) and as a sceptic (taken as formulating demands on what we should believe,

(i.e., the author of *On Certainty*).[3] In contrast, the parallel to G. E. Moore and contemporary common sense-philosophy shrinks to an overlap in usage of the term 'common sense' for what each is doing.[4] Moore and the contemporaries treat common sense propositions as true and known and employ them to show that certain philosophical theories are wrong. Reid, by contrast, finds beliefs suggested to us by our common sense to be irresistible and immediate (i.e., not the product of reasoning), which renders certain philosophical theories nearly unintelligible, and certainly ridden of any practical value, for we can never believe nor act in accordance with them.

The closeness between Hume and Reid has been noted before. The following exchange between contemporaries of Reid, Sir Mackintosh (1765-1832) and Thomas Brown (1778-1820), has been extensively quoted in the literature, although rarely as expressing a truth.

> In 1812, as the present writer [James Mackintosh] observed to him [Thomas Brown] that Reid and Hume differed more in words than in opinion, he answered, 'Yes, Reid bawled out, We must believe an outward world; but added in a whisper, We can give no reason for our belief. Hume cries out, We can give no reason for such a notion; and whispers, I own we cannot get rid of it.' (Mackintosh 1837: 346)[5]

cf. Meeker 1998, Levine & Andreotta 2020). It is also agreed on all sides that Reid replies to Hume. So far, though, interpretations of Reid presuppose a reading of Hume as a sceptic. If the reading of Hume as a naturalist is plausible, as I think it is, there should be a reading of Reid available that takes Reid as replying to Hume the naturalist. This dissertation supplies such a reading.

[3]Differing interpretations of Wittgenstein abound. I'm favouring those of the non-epistemic strand, e.g. Strawson (1985), Moyal-Sharrock (2005) or Read (2005). Again, the parallel between Reid and Wittgenstein has already been noted (e.g. Rysiew (2017)), but, so far, it presupposes an epistemic reading of Wittgenstein. Here, I supply a reading of Reid that can explain the parallel to Wittgenstein if the latter is interpreted along non-epistemic lines.

[4]But note that his 1939 *Proof of an External World* (hereafter *Proof*) is explicitly not directed against the sceptic. Instead, as he tells us in *A reply to my Critics* (part of Schilpp's 1942 *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*), he solely targets the idealist, who denies that there is an external world, whereas the sceptic denies that we have knowledge of the world. The interpretation of Moore as an epistemological fundamentalist is much better supported by his earlier *Defence of Common Sense*, published in 1925, where he explicitly argues against those who pretend to have no knowledge of his common sense propositions.

[5]What is quoted here is a footnote in the second edition of Mackintosh's *Dissertation on the Progress of Ethical Philosophy*. The first edition seems to have been published as part of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1830 (i.e., the seventh edition thereof, which is officially dated to 1842, but was published from 1830 onwards). Most often, the exchange

As neither Thomas Brown nor Sir Mackintosh have offered us an according and comprehensive reading of Reid's philosophy,[6] this work begins to fill that void. In order to proceed, here is everything you need to know to follow my argumentation.

Thomas Reid was a Scottish early modern philosopher (1710-1796).[7] He published three monographs, the *Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), and the *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788).[8] Reid is generally credited with having formulated one of the first, possibly the first, non-Euclidean Geometry[9] and for the distinction between sensation and perception, now standard in psychology.[10]

Contemporary reference to Reid is made mostly to his theory of perception, as some think that he defends a theory of naive realism, which claims that we directly perceive external objects, and to his discussion of common sense. Common sense plays a guiding role in what Reid takes to be proper philosophical questions and ways to answer them, and this methodological role is discussed by Reid, as well.

Especially important for this dissertation are his first principles of common sense. Besides a minor appearance at the beginning of the EIP, they make up a big part of the seventh Essay, entitled *Of Judgement*. The first principles deal with the existence of the soul and its thoughts, perception, induction, that we have some form of access to other minds via gestures and facial expression, that we have power, and so on. Here, reproduction of the two most referenced principles must suffice. A full list can be found in

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is quoted in the rendition of Galen Strawson (1990: 15), although it lacks the reference to the original.

[6]Indeed, Mackintosh has written only one philosophical work, being otherwise occupied with literature and politics, whereas Thomas Brown did spent most of his adult life (though he died at the age of 42) writing, and later teaching, philosophy. He shared a professorship with Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), a friend of Reid and the author of his Reid's biography (1811). For a brief account of Brown's criticism of Reid, see Brody (1971: 431).

[7]The biography can be found in the Hamilton Edition of Reid's work. More information about the Aberdeen Philosophical Society that Reid founded can be found in Wood (2006).

[8]References are to the now standard edition by Knud Haakonssen, published by the Edinburgh University Press. Continuing, I will abbreviate the *Inquiry into the Human Mind* as IHM, the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* as EIP, and the *Essays on the Active Powers* as EAP.

[9]See, for example, Daniels (1974) or Van Cleve (2015).

[10]It is usually thought that the psychologist James J. Gibson was the first to credit Reid with this distinction. Van Cleve (2015: 9) claims to have found an earlier source in the philosopher H. H. Price (1932).

chapter 4.2.

> 5. Another first principle is, That those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be. (EIP 476)
>
> 7. Another first principle is, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious. (EIP 480)

As can be seen from the way just these two are formulated, they do seem suited for an epistemologist, and especially fundamentalist, reading of Reid. If the two principles are taken to be true statements about the world, they imply the falsity of scepticism and various anti-realist positions, as well as what is often described as rationalism, i.e., that the only (or at least the primary) trustworthy source of belief is the intellect, and not perception.

Thus, to give you some idea of his reception in contemporary philosophy, de Bary's book, *Thomas Reid and Skepticism*, is marketed as being 'of substantial interest [...] to specialists and students of contemporary epistemology'.[11] Putnam, in the foreword to Norman Daniels' book on Reid, calls Reid 'one of the truly great epistemologists' (Norman 1989: i) and in the *Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers*, published in 2001, Ernest Sosa and James Van Cleve

> [discuss] in greater detail what is perhaps most famous and distinctive in Reid's philosophy: his defense of a philosophy of common sense in terms of a set of epistemic principles with a distinctive status, set against any deliverances of reason, intuitive or inferential. (Sosa, Van Cleve: 179)

In contrast, if we take into account the whole of Reid's work and move through it chronologically, it becomes apparent that long before reaching the seventh essay, Reid has taken turns that bar an epistemic reading of the first principles. On my (descriptivist) reading, then, the propositions numbered 5 and 7 above merely say that we believe, as a matter of psychological necessity (because we are constituted like this - by God, mind you),[12] that what we

[11] Taken from the book's dust jacket.

[12] The reference to God, I think, serves no philosophical purpose here. Reid simply believes that we were constituted like we are by God, but he doesn't use that conviction in his arguments. Others disagree, because if you are reading this as a work of epistemology,

perceive is really there and that we believe that our natural faculties do not systematically lead us astray. And it's true! We do have these beliefs, and we even have them in the way Reid says we have, namely irresistibly and immediately, that is, without argument.

The main thesis I'm arguing against is that Reid's work is about epistemology. This hasn't been argued for directly yet, but it is the guiding background assumption of most contemporary interpretations, whether it is a reliabilist, a fundamentalist, a pragmatistic interpretation, or something else entirely, like Lehrer's interpretation of Reid.[13] Because the focus of the epistemological interpretation lies almost wholly on the notions of common sense and Reid's first principles, this is likewise the focus of this dissertation. I acknowledge that Reid at times says things that could belong to the discipline of epistemology, but it would be wrong to therefore think that everything else he says belongs to epistemology as well. Additionally, it is still a matter of interpretation whether he alludes to categorical reasons, in the sense that we should trust our perceptions because what they report is true and we should believe true things no matter what. Or whether he alludes to merely instrumental reasons, in the sense that we should believe something only insofar we have an according aim. As a result of these two points, I'm not discouraged by the occasional epistemological remark of Reid, as long as I can show that what is thought to be his epistemological theory is in fact a description of the mind and its operations.

More specifically, the main argument of the dissertation is based on the fact that Reid takes normativity to be applicable only where it is not only possible to follow a norm, but where it is likewise possible to break it. With regard to beliefs we have necessarily and irresistibly, we can't break norms that say that we should trust these beliefs. Incidentally, Reid characterises the beliefs yielded by the first principles of common sense exactly as psycho-

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the need for absolute certainty is not satisfied by our constitution alone. A benevolent maker, however, does satisfy this need. This path of interpretation is taken by Daniels (1974) and Popkin (1980), for example. Nonetheless, theistic beliefs might play an important role reconciling the findings of such a theory (including the ultimate groundlessness of our beliefs or the absence of reasoning in many of our beliefs). Plantinga (1993: 237) has captured a variant of this idea in the expression that 'naturalistic epistemology flourishes best in the garden of supernaturalistic metaphysics'. A theistic mind might better stomach the groundlessness of our beliefs than an atheistic one.

[13] Lehrer thinks that neither fundamentalism nor reliabilism capture Reid's alleged insights. We will meet Lehrer throughout the dissertation. For a good summary of his views, see Lehrer (2017).

logically necessary, irresistible and immediate. Therefore, I deem it wrong to interpret Reid as someone who makes epistemically normative claims about these beliefs. Given that the ascription of these normative claims is a product of interpretation, meaning Reid does not straight out proclaim them, I think that there is room for an interpretation according to which the reason for the absence of such claims is that Reid did not want to make them (contrary to: they are so blatantly obvious that he didn't see the need to proclaim them).

This also means that I don't have to deny that Reid ever assesses beliefs normatively. Whenever a belief is not irresistible, psychologically necessary and immediate, there is room to change, to improve, and therefore, to evaluate and assess. So, whereas the epistemological interpretations of Reid go wrong in claiming that his epistemology is based on common sense and first principles, there is a place for epistemology within the framework of the common sense beliefs.[14] However, I will try to convince you that this epistemology is neither introduced nor defended in Reid's works.

For some initial plausibility, note that one of Reid's principles of necessary truths is 'That no man ought to be blamed for what it was not in his power to hinder' (EIP 494). Although this is listed as a moral principle, Reid himself applies it to epistemology when he criticises the alleged sceptic on the grounds that sceptics make epistemic normative claims which no one can follow. Incidentally, he never joins into Moore's effort to disprove the sceptic by showing his hands, although the epistemic reading of the first principles would allow exactly such moves.

As I claimed in the very beginning, my thesis is limited to his published writings. Accordingly, I merely present the views Reid thought good and matured enough to include in his publications, which are likewise those that Reid wanted to be ascribed to him. There is evidence that Reid made conscious decisions between what to include in, and what to leave out of,

[14] And thus the parallel to Wittgenstein is made apparent. Both conceive there to be beliefs/propositions that are neither justified nor unjustified, but on the grounds of which we can assess the remaining beliefs/propositions. In Wittgenstein's case, this has to do with his concept of objective certainty. In Reid's case, it has to do with the fact that everyone is constituted such that we have these beliefs necessarily, immediately and irresistibly. The main difference is that Wittgenstein conceives the framework to change (as is evinced by the river-metaphor (OC 97) and the surrounding discussion of the concepts of *Mythologie* and *Weltbild*), whereas on Reid's side, our constitution would have to change in order for the framework to change.

the published material. Reid, at times, copied material from his manuscripts and letters into his monographs. Thus, Nichols (2007a: 215) cites part of a letter from Reid to Henry Home, Lord Kames (C 107), in which Reid talks about belief, knowledge and evidence in ways that seem to suggest a more epistemological concern on Reid's part. We find a copy of the second half of that letter at EIP 244, but the first, epistemological, part was not copied. Nichols resumes:

> So he explicitly elected to omit the quoted [i.e., the epistemological] passages form publication. I have no reason to think that he would not have placed these thoughts into his published work had they accurately represented his views. Perhaps modesty about epistemic claims, along with the permanence of the printed word, conspired to forestall him from publishing. (Nichols 2007b: 216)

Although I agree that the unpublished manuscripts are interesting and important, here I will respect Reid's decision about what should, and what shouldn't, inform our judgement and interpretation of him.

Now that we are already in the territory of this dissertation's methodology, let me briefly complete the picture by saying something about the principle of charity and the principles I aspire to follow instead.[15] The principle of charity is adopted by many contemporary philosophers. It roughly states that, if a philosopher says something that is obviously wrong, we can instead interpret it in a way that the result is acceptable (contemporary examples of this are supplied in Melamed 2013: 260-3). 'Obviously wrong' and 'acceptable' are already two red flags, because who decides about such matters? This is especially problematic in the field of philosophy. Why should the fact that a majority of philosophers today accepts a certain view, influence at all what we should ascribe to past philosophers? With regard to Reid, the principle of charity is invoked by interpreters in order to ascribe to Reid an epistemology that affords a plausible answer to the sceptic, even where there is little to no textual evidence for such a view. The reason is that Reid was opposed to scepticism. As one of the great philosophers, he therefore must have, by our contemporary lights, a 'good' answer to the sceptic. That there are other, historical and contemporary, opinions about

[15] A fuller discussion on this topic can be found in Melamed (2013). I wholly agree with his view on the principle of charity.

what a 'good' answer amounts to, and whether an opposition to scepticism requires an answer at all, is simply ignored.

The only place for the principle of charity that I can envision is with regard to phenomenological matters. If Reid invites his readers to mental experimentation and introspection, what we find upon following his instructions can, and maybe should, inform us about what he was after.

This is also a part of the more general principle of interpretation that I will adhere to, namely to adopt in interpreting Reid only methods that he himself allowed for such an undertaking. He presupposes that humans are alike enough such that introspection not only reveals something about oneself, but also about most other people. If this were false, all progress in this field would be barred. Therefore, I can take my introspective experience to inform me about what Reid meant when he talks, on the basis of his own introspection, about certain mental phenomena.

Another example pertains to his aversion against hypotheses, speculation, and theory.

> It is therefore more agreeable to good sense, and to sound philosophy, to rest satisfied with what our consciousness and attentive reflection discover to us of the nature of perception, than by inventing hypotheses, to attempt to explain things which are above the reach of human understanding. I believe no man is able to explain how we perceive external objects, any more than how we are conscious of those that are internal. Perception, consciousness, memory and imagination, are all original and simple powers of the mind, and parts of its constitution. For this reason, though I have endeavoured to show, that the theories of Philosophers on this subject are ill grounded and insufficient, I do not attempt to substitute any other theory in their place. (EIP 193)

Any interpretation that ascribes to Reid a theory of perception, therefore, is already beyond what I think a just interpretation can accomplish. Thus, in a sense, this is a Reidian interpretation of Reid, not because I think that we should adopt Reid's methods at all times, but because I think that by adopting Reid's methods about Reid and his subject matter, we will be able to paint a picture that is as truthful to the original as it can get. In the same vein, I would comply with any philosopher's method in interpreting

said philosopher.

Additionally, and in line with Reid's preference for data over explanations and theories of them, I have adopted the convention to cite Reid more extensively, both in quantity and with regard to individual quotes. Where applicable, I have chosen to extend the quotation to the full unit of meaning. I feel that quoting in full units of meaning already shines a different light on Reid, even if we limit ourselves to those passages usually cited in Reid-scholarship.

The structure of this dissertation is to move as directly as possible to the main thesis, and afterwards, to spell out the most interesting implications, and to defuse the most pressing objections. In order to make my case, I will have to tell you about Reid's methodology and his aim with both the *Inquiry* and *Essays*. This is happening in chapter 2. It also shifts the burden of proof towards the standard interpretation, because his aims and methods are the *prima facie* evidence for what his works are about. My finding is that they neither give the impression that Reid is concerned with epistemology, nor are his methods suited to pursue such a project. Chapter 3 prepares the discussion of common sense and its first principles by arguing for three theses that together undermine the standard approach to the first principles. The theses are (i) that there are irresistible beliefs, (ii) that perception is not factive, and (iii) that evidence is not normative. It also features a brief crash-course into his philosophy of mind. Chapter 4 discusses common sense and its first principles. It presents them as principles of belief only. That is, all the list of principles tells us is what beliefs we form under which conditions. Chapter 5 discusses his approach to scepticism and the way of ideas. Afterwards, chapter 6 collects differing interpretations of Reid and argues that they are less coherent than the view I present here.

Chapter 2

Reid's self-description

> I have not as yet been able to deduce from phenomena the reasons for the property of gravity, and I do not feign hypotheses. For whatever is not deduced from the phenomena must be called a hypothesis; and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, or based on occult qualities, or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy.
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> Newton, Principia, General Scholium, p. 943.

In order to have a better footing later on, I want to shift the burden of proof from where it is now, i.e., wholly on my side, to the middle ground. To achieve this, we will collect Reid's remarks on his aims and methods from the introductory chapters (including dedications) of both the *Inquiry* and *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*. That way, we capture what Reid thinks his work is about, or, at the very least, what he wanted his readers to think his work is about. Because we have no reason to expect deception on Reid's part, this, then, constitutes our *prima facie* evidence for what his work is about. Anyone unfamiliar with Reid's work would base his expectations on exactly these passages. The result of this chapter will be that these

passages, and therefore the *prima facie* evidence, suggests that Reid is not only working within a project we could call descriptive psychology, but also that he is unwilling and unable to make the epistemic claims usually ascribed to him. The epistemological interpretation has to claim that despite all the *prima facie* evidence, things are very different from what they seem to be, that Reid is painting a wrong picture of himself and that what his work is about is different from what Reid says his work is about. It becomes already apparent, then, that my interpretation, if valid, does justice to Reid's self-description in a way that epistemic readings do not.

Proceeding this way also serves as a good introduction for those less familiar with Reid. Even so, the passages below are often cited and used in interpretations of Reid, so a rehearsal should do more good than harm. Lastly, this also supports the overarching narrative of this work, as a re-evaluation would have started with Reid's motivation, aims and methods anyway. The focus, however, is on the way Reid represents himself to his readers more so than on his methodology in general. For purposes of readability and given that judging these matters adequately requires the preceding issues to be developed, the critical and in-depth discussion of his relationship to the way of ideas and its proponents, and to scepticism will be deferred to chapter 5.

The titles of his three monographs, *The Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, *The Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, and the *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* suggest that Reid is concerned with the human mind and its powers. The titles of the chapters seem to confirm this. Whereas the *Inquiry* seems to focus on perception and the five senses, the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* seem to deal with the other mental faculties, such as memory, conception and judgement. Lastly, the *Essays on Active Power* seem to contain a discussion of the will, action and freedom of will. All three have in common the mind and its directedness towards the world, either as the receiving end, as in perception, or as the intentional end, as in action (as every action aims to change the world in some respect).

I have to anticipate a feature of Reid's philosophy of mind, because you could take this to mean that Reid is concerned both with the mind and with the world, and that being directed to the world entails the existence of the world. That would be to disregard that Reid acknowledges the property of intentional inexistence. For him, facts of aboutness, or directedness,

don't entail facts about existence. Just as my fear of ghosts doesn't entail the existence of ghosts, finding that many of our mental states are about external objects does not entail that external objects exist.[1] Whereas Reid is content with this observation,[2] the epistemological reading assumes that he additionally attempts to show that these beliefs, such as those about the existence of external objects, are justified and true (thus requiring the external objects to exist).

The *Inquiry's* dedication is where Reid speaks about his overarching motivation of enquiry, which is to repel scepticism and its consequences. Reid cites Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* and the 'absolute scepticism' therein propagated as what motivated him to enter into the subject anew, to test its assumptions, and to finally replace the foregoing theories of mind.[3] In Reid's eyes, because of the role they assign to ideas, they all lead to scepticism. His new theory rejects the existence of ideas, and therefore doesn't lead to scepticism. As to Hume's 'absolute scepticism', Reid finds it

> is not more destructive of the faith of a Christian, than the science of a philosopher, and of the prudence of a man of understanding. I am persuaded, that the unjust *live by faith* as well as the *just*; that, if all belief could be laid aside, piety, patriotism, friendship, parental affection, and private virtue, would appear as ridiculous as knight-errantry; and that the pursuits of pleasure, of ambition, and of avarice, must be grounded upon belief, as well as those that are honourable and virtuous. The day-labourer toils at his work, in the belief that he shall receive his wages at night; and if he had not this belief, he would not

[1] Wolterstorff, to the contrary, thinks the correct formalization of perceptual statements such as 'A perceives X' is $\exists X(ApX)$. Thus, every real perception entails the existence of the perceived object.

[2] Many contemporary philosophers do not believe that intentional objects exist, and therefore they don't believe that there are things that don't exist, such as ghosts. Reid seems to think that if you imagine a centaur, what you imagine is literally a centaur, a being that does not exist. I take this to be enough to claim the property of intentional inexistence for the mental. Reid's commitment to non-existent objects is based on the following passage: 'I conceive a centaur. This conception is an operation of the mind, of which I am conscious, and to which I can attend. The sole object of it is a centaur, an animal which, I believe, never existed' (EIP 321; see also EIP 160-161).

[3] In this, Reid resembles Kant, who, in the first pages of the *Prolegomena* (4: 260), reports that Hume has awoken him from his dogmatic slumber. Some interpreters find there to be more parallels still, for example, in taking Reid's first principles to be instances of the synthetic a priori, cf. Baumann (1999).

toil. (IHM 4)

The above passage suggests that Reid has a broader understanding of scepticism, one intertwined with practical and psychological matters.[4] And Reid takes issue with these matters, rather than with the abstract problem of scepticism as the possibility of error and the ensuing lack of justification or knowledge. I take it that Reid finds a world in which friendship, patriotism, parental affection, piety, virtue, etc. are overcome as very undesirable, even more so a world in which people stop tilling their field. It is no exaggeration that a world in which no one does anything is the end of civilization, if not humanity.

Of course, this requires, first, as the quote suggests, that we understand scepticism as demanding the suspension of many of our beliefs, and secondly, that belief plays a necessary role generally and with regard to the attitudes mentioned in the quoted passage. As to the former point, the chapter *Of Scepticism with Regard to Reason* in Hume's *Treatise* features an argument to that effect, albeit its main purpose there is to show that the argument is psychologically ineffective: it does not lead us to actually suspend any belief. Hume's intent in discussing the argument is to show the negligible role of reason in the process of belief-formation.[5]

As to the latter point, Reid's judgement about the destructive powers of scepticism, he does believe that belief plays such a necessary role. In the *Essays*, he parallels the relation that belief has to man's life with the way that faith is necessary for a Christian life – 'belief in general is the main spring in the life of a man' (EIP 228). With these two requirements in place, we can see why Reid thinks that scepticism would have disastrous consequences.[6]

It is important to highlight that Reid conditionalizes the passage. Like Hume, he thinks that the suspension of judgement doesn't happen. Furthermore, as I will later argue, he goes as far as thinking that it is psychologically impossible to suspend such judgements and, in part for this reason,

[4]This result is further substantiated in chapter 5.1.2.

[5]There is no agreement about this in the literature, but Reid is aware of the instrumental role of Hume's sceptical argument and even offers an interpretation of Hume's conclusion with which he would agree (EIP 572).

[6]The focus on the practical and psychological fits nicely to recent interpretations of Hume, according to which Hume understood scepticism oftentimes more as temperament than a doctrine. Cf. Goldhaber (2020), Ainslie (2015: 11 ff.).

that there are no true sceptics.[7] Reid merely points out what consequences would appear *if* all beliefs could be laid aside, thus suggesting that it is not the case that all belief can be laid aside. Still, it is plausible that even the attempt to throw off one's beliefs would have these, or some of these, negative consequences.

More will be said on what kind of scepticism, if any, is contained in Hume's philosophy. However, Hume himself called his philosophy sceptical,[8] and Reid could have simply followed suit. For now, all we know is that Reid thinks that this scepticism has its ground in the way of ideas, and that we don't have to accept the way of ideas because it is wholly unsupported:

> For my own satisfaction, I entered into a serious examination of the principles upon which this sceptical system is built; and was not a little surprised to find, that it leans with its whole weight upon a hypothesis, which is ancient indeed, and hath been very generally received by philosophers, but of which I could find no solid proof. The hypothesis I mean, is, That nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it: That we do not really perceive things that are external, but only certain images and pictures of them imprinted upon the mind, which are called impressions and ideas. (IHM 4)

This is the first of many formulations of the way of ideas in the *Inquiry*. Many interpreters build their argument unto a specific understanding of what the way of ideas is, and indeed much hinges upon the understanding of the way of ideas. For example, if every legitimate attack against the way of ideas presupposes employment of epistemic notions, this would heavily impinge upon my proposal here. In order to prevent major sidetracking, discussion of the way of ideas, as well as its relationship to scepticism, is postponed to chapter 5. For now, we proceed with Reid's answer that 'the sceptical system [...] leans with its whole weight upon [the way of ideas]'.

In closing the dedication of the *Inquiry*, Reid summarizes his work as a system of human understanding without the way of ideas (and thereby without the occasion for scepticism), limited to the five senses.

[7] Chapter 5.1.2 contains the in-depth discussion of this point.

[8] In the anonymously published *Abstract*, he calls 'the philosophy contained in this book [...] very sceptical'. Most scholars take Hume to be the author of the *Abstract*, the exception being Nelson (1976), who argues that the author is Adam Smith. For a defence of the view that Hume is the author, see Connon and Pollard (1977).

> I thought it unreasonable, my Lord, upon the authority of philosophers, to admit a hypothesis, which, in my opinion, overturns all philosophy, all religion and virtue, and all common sense: and finding that all the systems concerning the human understanding which I was acquainted with, were built upon this hypothesis, I resolved to inquire into this subject anew, without regard to any hypothesis.
>
> What I now humbly present to your Lordship, is the fruit of this inquiry, so far only as it regards the five senses. (IHM 4-5)

Having learned where his motivation originated from and that he rejects the way of ideas, his comments on the subject within which he pursues his aim and its methods will help to determine just what the nature of his rejection and replacement of the way of ideas is. The introductory chapters of both the *Inquiry* and the *Essays* include sections on the subject, as well as its methods, difficulties and the work of predecessors, among other topics.

In both works, he specifies his subject as philosophy of mind, pneumatology, and even as anatomy of the mind. Most telling is the latter, since anatomy must be a purely descriptive discipline.[9] 'All that we know of the body', says Reid, 'is owing to anatomical dissection and observation, and it must be by an anatomy of the mind that we can discover its powers and principles' (IHM 12). With regard to pneumatology, the Preface to the EIP states that 'all our knowledge is confined to body and mind, or things belonging to them' and that, therefore, there are only 'two great branches of philosophy, one relating to body, the other to mind'. While the first is called natural philosophy, the latter, dealing with the 'nature and operations of minds' is called pneumatology (EIP 12). In the absence of contrary evidence it wouldn't be wrong to assume that philosophy of mind and pneumatology are descriptive as well.[10]

[9] A little further in the *Inquiry*, Reid says: 'And if ever our philosophy concerning the human mind is carried so far as to deserve the name of science, which ought never to be despaired of, it must be by observing facts, reducing them to general rules, and drawing just conclusions from them' (IHM 59).

[10] Note that pneumatology is being taught as a subject at Reid's school and has nothing to do with stoicism (except for its etymology). There is another source available that could inform us what Reid means by pneumatology. It is a report of a committee, on which Reid served, to revise the curriculum (including pneumatology). However, as we can't extract Reid's input from that of his colleagues, and because there might be a difference between what Reid wanted to be taught, and his personal views on the matter, I will not consider the report an objective source on which to ground what Reid thought pneumatology

Having learned *what* Reid is doing, and *why* he is doing it, let us now turn to *how* he proposes to do it. A large share of his comments on the eligible methods for his project involve discussion of what not to do, whereas the positive comments are kept relatively short, and boil down to (i) observation and (ii) careful induction.

Reid is very vocal that the problems of philosophy are to a great part due to the reliance on hypotheses and analogical reasoning, claiming that 'the world has been so long befooled by hypotheses in all parts of philosophy, that it is of the utmost consequence to every man who would make any progress in real knowledge, to treat them with just contempt' (EIP 50). Thus, both hypotheses and analogical reasoning are shunned from Reid's tool-kit.

> Let us, therefore, lay down this as a fundamental principle in our enquiries into the structure of the mind, and its operations, that no regard is due to conjectures or hypotheses of Philosophers, however ancient, however generally received. Let us accustom ourselves to try every opinion by the touchstone of fact and experience. What can fairly be deduced from facts duly observed, or sufficiently attested, is genuine and pure; it is the voice of God, and no fiction of human imagination. (EIP 51)

This rejection of hypotheses can be taken as proxy for the rejection of conjectures, speculation and theorizing as well, since Reid does not differentiate between these: 'Such conjectures in philosophical matters have commonly got the name of *hypotheses*, or *theories*' (EIP 48). We can characterize theories, conjecture and hypotheses as going beyond observation, as not being induced from observations (cf. Laudan 1970: 108). The passage also includes another statement of Reid's aim as enquiring into the structure and operations of the mind.

The contempt of Reid for hypotheses is one respect in which he adopts parts of the Newtonian programme.[11] Lastly, it is important to point out that Reid argues for this heuristic, and doesn't accept it on Newton's or

comprises. For further discussion of the report, see Wood (1997: 295), Buras (2019: 298), see also (IHM 220).

[11] On this point, see Copenhaver (2006), Wood (1995), or Laudan (1970), among others. See Davenport (1987) for the argument that the emphasis should be on Bacon, and that Reid's reference to Newton's work is based on it being a good example of the Baconian method. See EIP 49, 50 and 79 for passages in which Reid voices his contempt for hypotheses.

Bacon's authority.[12]

Not only are we to pay no regard to hypotheses, the same holds true for analogical reasoning, especially so in the direction from body to mind. Although this isn't Reid's focus, it is implied by Reid's rejection of hypotheses. Analogical reasoning is just one way in which hypotheses are formed – hypotheses about something unobservable in one realm (for if it were observable, we wouldn't need the analogical argument) on the basis of something observable in another realm.

Reid further motivates the rejection of analogical reasoning by his commitment to dualism. We have to take Reid's dualism as a presupposition, because, in his published writings, he never argues for it. The only thing we have is his comment that there are 'very strong proofs' that the mind is immaterial (EIP 89) – proofs which he never produces. Although it might not be enough to fill in the metaphysical picture, Reid certainly observes there to be vast differences between the mental and the non-mental. It is part of the phenomena, and therefore part of the data with which Reid allows himself to work.[13]

> But all arguments, drawn from analogy, are still the weaker, the greater the disparity there is between the things compared; and therefore must be weakest of all when we compare body with mind, because there are no two things in nature more unlike. (EIP 54)[14]

I have already hinted at the influence of Newton and Bacon on Reid's methodology, and this holds especially true with regards to the actual methods he allows himself to pursue his project. Thus, in the first section of the

[12] Laudan (1970: 109 ff.) has compiled a list of Reid's arguments in support of his own *hypotheses non fingo*.

[13] 'Of this we are absolutely ignorant, having no means of knowing how the body acts upon the mind, or the mind upon the body. When we consider the nature and attribute of both, they seem to be so different, and so unlike, that we can find no handle by which the one may lay hold of the other. There is a deep and dark gulf between them, which our understanding cannot pass; and the manner of their correspondence and intercourse is absolutely unknown' (IHM 176).

[14] Reid might echo Arnauld here. In his *On True and False Ideas*, Arnauld (1843/1990: 60) writes: 'Thus they believe that they will find some analogy in the body which will allow them to understand how we see with the mind everything that we conceive, and above all material things. [...] [T]he mind and the body are two substances which are wholly distinct and, as it were, opposites, so their properties should have nothing in common. Only confusion can result from trying to explain the one by the other [...].'

Inquiry, Reid mentions Newton's *regulae philosophandi* as being maxims of common sense and the only true rules by which one can properly philosophize (IHM 12). I take that the rest of the *Inquiry* is the result of Reid applying these rules to his field of enquiry, i.e., the science of the human mind.

In particular, Reid considers three sources of information regarding the mental, all of which are specific kinds of observations: introspection, observation of other sentient beings, and observation of linguistic practices, the former being the most important.

> Since we ought to pay no regard to hypotheses, and to be very suspicious of analogical reasoning, it may be asked from what source must the knowledge of the mind, and its faculties, be drawn?
> I answer, the chief and proper source of this branch of knowledge is accurate reflection upon the operations of our own minds. (EIP 56)

Reid thinks that careful introspection is difficult, even something that many will not be able to master. Reid observes that most mental operations direct the mind towards their objects, and it is difficult to take notice of the mental operation itself. Only careful introspection allows the subject to have awareness of the mental operation as well as its object. Even then, we are restricted to our own minds, for our access to other minds is mediated through 'outward signs' like the tone of voice, facial expression and gesture.

> An anatomist who hath happy opportunities, may have access to examine with his own eyes, and with equal accuracy, bodies of all different ages, sexes, and conditions; so that what is defective, obscure, or preternatural in one, may be discerned clearly, and in its most perfect state in another. But the anatomist of the mind cannot have the same advantage. It is his own mind only that he can examine, with any degree of accuracy and distinctness. This is the only subject that he can look into. He may, from outward signs, collect the operations of other minds; but these signs are for the most part ambiguous, and must be interpreted by what he perceives within himself. (IHM 13)

Despite this problem, Reid takes observation of other sentient beings as a source of information regarding their inner lives. Thus, he takes the behaviour of parents to show 'that the parental affection is common to mankind' (EIP 57), and in general takes himself able to judge 'from the general conduct of men, what are the natural objects of their esteem, their admiration, their love, their approbation, their resentment, and of all their other original dispositions' (ibid.).

As to the role of language and grammar in his methodology, Reid thinks that it is possible to carefully reason from certain basic grammatical features to the speaker's opinions and beliefs.

> There are certain common opinions of mankind, upon which the structure and grammar of all languages are founded. While these opinions are common to all men, there will be a great similarity in all languages that are to be found on the face of the earth. (EIP 36)

One example is a nation that holds that attributes can exist without subjects. Their language, Reid imagines, would have no distinction between adjectives and substantives. Adding a little later that 'language is the express image and picture of human thought' (EIP 45), we see that this, too, is a method suited only for a descriptive enterprise. Reflections on language will show us who believes what, but never what one should believe.

What we have seen so far as his motivation, aim and suitable methods makes sense for a descriptive psychologist, but as an epistemologist, Reid would be interested in the *status quo* only insofar it is what gets evaluated (sceptical doubts unreasonable, belief in material objects justified). There is yet to be evidence for any method that enables Reid to make such evaluations. None of the methods available to Reid allow him to pursue normative epistemology, to prove that the sceptic is wrong, to prove that we know that the external world exists. The available methods can only reveal what we think and believe, not what we ought to believe, or whether we are rational (in the sense the epistemologist is interested in, not means-end rationality) in believing so.

There is another motivation both Reid and Hume cite for furthering the 'science of man', namely that it would improve the other sciences, and practically everything that involves human mental activity. This highlights

that Reid is not in the business of replacing epistemology with psychology. Rather, it is that he is doing the latter, and that he is not doing the former. He might think that his results should inform any forthcoming epistemology, as well as the other sciences, because, for example, knowing our mental powers, their limits, biases etc. helps with anything that involves mental activity. We can expect there to be improvements everywhere else, not because we can wilfully believe better, but because the psychologically informed physicist will be less prone to certain errors than the uninformed. The way in which it will inform epistemology is by showing that the attempt to justify, just as the attempt to cast into doubt, certain propositions, is a fruitless activity. But with regard to other propositions, my interpretation in no way closes the door to epistemology. In fact, I think that Reid would be very open and interested in a practical epistemology that finds and corrects tendencies to fallacious reasoning – just like we learned to be careful of our intuitions with regard to infinity and probability.[15]

It has been suggested that common sense also plays a methodological role within Reid's philosophy. Scattered throughout the first chapters, there are indeed a couple of passages in which Reid voices his allegiance to common sense. Here, just one example will do:

> It is a bold philosophy that rejects, without ceremony, principles which irresistibly govern the belief and the conduct of all mankind in the common concerns of life [i.e., the principles of common sense]; and to which the philosopher himself must yield, after he imagines he hath confuted them. Such principles are older, and of more authority, than Philosophy: she rests upon them as her basis, not they upon her. If she could overturn them, she must be buried in their ruins; but all the engines of philosophical subtilty are too weak for this purpose; and the attempt is no less ridiculous, than if a mechanic should contrive an *axis in petrichio* to remove the earth out of its place; or if a mathematician should pretend to demonstrate, that things equal to the same thing are not equal to one another. (IHM 21)

But this, as we will see later on, is just a statement of his view that

[15] I'm thinking of such cases as the Monty Hall problem or Hilbert's Grand Hotel. Another instance of a practical epistemology that is heavily informed by psychology could be Kahnemann's (2011) *Thinking Fast and Slow*.

there are beliefs that are necessarily had, irresistible, and immediate. To call it a methodological commitment that, given this view, we shouldn't try to uproot these beliefs, is not very compelling.

The mention of authority could tempt us to think that Reid claims both the necessity and irresistibility of common sense principles *and* that we should believe them. This view is shared by Rysiew and Lehrer, whose interpretations are being discussed in chapter 6. My argument why Reid won't apply normative notions to necessary matters is located in chapter 5.

There are other ways to deal with the mention of authority, and, as they involve moves that reappear throughout this dissertation, I will briefly mention them. First, we can resist the urge to take authority to be a normative. Just as it is sensible to say that we should believe Goedel when it comes to the existence of mathematical entities, because he is an authority, there is also the political or judicial sense of the term available, which need not be normative (and the preceding sentence speaks of the principles governing). A judge has the authority to put a thief into prison, just as some heads of state have the authority to declare war. Applied to the issue at hand, Reid need not say anything about what should be believed by using the term 'authority'. He might just as well describe the de facto distribution of power: philosophy depends on the principles. Principles, in contrast, irresistibly *govern* the conduct of all mankind.

Even if we were to uphold that there is something normative about authority, it need not be the right kind of normativity. In saying that you should do something, I might mean that you should do it no matter what, or I might mean that you should do so in order to reach your subjective ends. Call the former sense objective normativity, and the latter subjective normativity. It corresponds to Kant's distinction between categorical and hypothetical imperatives, or that between practical and instrumental rationality. In each case, one half of the distinction takes into account the subjective ends, and the other half not.

To further furnish the distinction, consider the following exchange:

> A: I believe in p.
> B: That's wrong, p is false. Here are some reasons that ought to make you believe that p is false.
> A: I don't want to change my mind. It would badly effect my happiness, I couldn't do the job with which I earn my money

> with, and I would lose all my friends. Your evidence does not affect me.
> B: I understand your personal reasons, however, I think it is still wrong to believe that p. Maybe I even think it is worse now that you continue to believe p.

The evaluation of B's second utterance is what I'm interested in here. This is the ought of epistemology, the ought I claim has no part in Reid's philosophy of common sense.

If you were to explore Reid anew by going through the introductory chapters of the *Inquiry* and *Essays*, the *prima facie* evidence suggests that Reid describes the mind, its powers, faculties and beliefs. There are few signs that he wants to establish that these beliefs are true and justified, or that they result from truth-tracking, reliable, trustworthy faculties. Of course, we hold them to be all that, but that is different from them being so, and still different from showing that they are. Given that we necessarily believe them to be so, the question of whether they are (or are not) becomes moot. One reason for this is Hume's point that such meta-beliefs, like the belief that our faculties are not trustworthy, are not stable.[16] We might reach such a conclusion in our lone studies, but as soon as we venture outside, socialise or become hungry, they vanish. As such, these beliefs don't matter to us as soon as we want something to eat or drink, because they are absent in all these situations, and in this sense the question whether they are true becomes moot. Should we build a perpetuum mobile? Should it be forbidden to build one? Such questions are superfluous, because it is impossible to build one. The same is true for beliefs that we have necessarily. Is it rational that we have them? Should we alter them? Under the assumption of Reid's theory of mind, these questions make no sense.

There is another option available, namely to find ourselves necessarily and irresistibly believing things that we know we shouldn't believe. We find this tragic situation and the ensuing despair at our human condition in Hume's conclusion to his first book of the *Treatise*. It is one of the chief differences between Hume and Reid that Reid finds joy and hope where Hume temporarily sees dread and despair. Speculating, this could be a result of their different stances on religion, but it can likewise be explained simply by a difference in personality.

[16] Two examples can be found at T 1.4.7.9 and T 1.4.2.57.

This, in any way, is the broader picture that will emerge in due course. The next chapter establishes three theses that will put the first principles into the proper view. Building on these, I will discuss the first principles both from a general point of view and each in detail. The remaining chapters take up on various implications and objections this new interpretation gives rise to.

Chapter 3

Reid's Philosophy of Mind

> Trust in the *LORD* with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.
>
> Proverbs 3:5

While the last chapter proceeded, by way of introducing Reid and his project, chronologically rather than systematically, we now reverse this approach and discuss the remainder of the relevant material systematically rather than chronologically. This makes sense especially because Reid scatters his remarks about these themes across different works, which would make a chronological approach tedious both to write and to read. In what follows, we take a brief look at Reid's philosophy of mind[1] and afterwards I will be establishing the following three theses:

1. That, according to Reid, some beliefs are immediate, irresistible, and psychologically necessary.
2. That, according to Reid, perception is non-factive.
3. That, according to Reid, evidence is not normative with regard to the beliefs mentioned in 1.

As 2 and 3 are considered wrong by most Reid-scholars, I will have to spend some time convincing you of their truth. The first thesis is accepted across the board, but I think only superficially so. The severity of it is radically

[1] Terminology-wise, I will stick to the neutral 'philosophy of mind' until I have shown that Reid's philosophy of mind *is* descriptive psychology.

underestimated. I will discuss 1-3 in their order, because the discussion of evidence is already closely connected to the discussion of the (self-evident) first principles. Both appear to be normative, and of both I contend that they are merely descriptive. But of that later more.

3.1 Reid's Philosophy of Mind in a Nutshell

Whereas the following sections are dedicated to one single thesis each, this section attempts to give a brief overview of Reid's philosophy of mind. It's purpose is to familiarize the uninitiated with its core pieces, while not begging any questions of the established scholarship. As to the latter challenge, it is made easier by the fact that there is not much conflict in the literature about the broader picture of his philosophy of mind. Likewise, my disagreement with other interpretations lies in the question of whether there is an epistemology on top of it. The conclusion of this dissertation is that there is not. Reid is solely offering us a philosophy of mind, and we have to understand his notion of common sense as a part of it.

One of the most important parts of his philosophy of mind is his nativism, which is, in general, the idea that 'important elements of our understanding of the world are innate, that they are part of our initial condition, and thus do not have to be learned from experience' (Samet & Zaitchick 2017). Faced with the task to explain the origin of some of our beliefs and notions, Reid will reply that they are innate, meaning that they are the result of principles which are part of our constitution. For example, Reid thinks that we are pre-equipped with principles of induction, veracity and credulity, without which we couldn't acquire practically necessary beliefs and notions.[2] Thus, the inductive principle yields beliefs about the future, the principle of credulity makes us believe our parents, and the principle of veracity makes it such that the testimony of others often coheres with their own beliefs – Reid think, we have, by means of the principle of veracity, a natural tendency towards telling (what we take to be) the truth – thus insuring that the principle of credulity produces more good than bad, generally speaking.

[2] Here I'm presupposing what I establish later, namely that principles are not themselves beliefs, but are the means by which the faculty of judgement produces beliefs. As the discussion of Reid's theory of signs a little further below makes clear, principles also equip us with a lot of important notions, including of things which we never experience. Were experience our only source of notions, we could not have notions of the mind, the faculties, etc.

Reid's stance on nativism also distinguishes him from his contemporaries, who thought of humans as entering the world as a blank slate, and acquiring beliefs and notions solely through experience. Locke's is presumably the most famous passage endorsing this view.

> Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters, without any ideas. Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the *materials* of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE. (EHU 104).

Reid rejects this, not because we have certain beliefs and notions already at birth, but because we are constituted such that we will have them, pending the right circumstances (ripe enough understanding, right input). At EIP 520, Reid addresses Locke's rejection of nativism and even agrees with it. This is, because neither Locke nor Reid think that there are hard-wired beliefs.[3]

> [Locke] endeavours to show, that axioms or intuitive truths are not innate. To this I agree. I maintain only, that when the understanding is ripe, and when we distinctly apprehend such truths, we immediately assent to them. (EIP 520)

However, as the upcoming bit about Reid's theory of signs suggests, especially natural signs of the third class, ripe understanding is no necessary condition for the production of certain notions and beliefs. As such, it is important to read the quotation as limited to propositions and our assent to them. If we pick up on Locke's metaphor for a second, Reid conceives the mind not as a white paper void of all characters, he takes the mind to be hard-wired, to be running a pre-installed program that waits for an input it can process, and to output the correspondent notion and belief.

Reid's stance on nativism is the result of observation. Besides the discussion of what it would take newborns to acquire certain notions and beliefs, and what would need to be in place in order for that to happen,[4] Reid also

[3] Locke (at EHU 50) also claims that if by nativism we only mean that what is innate is a capacity for knowledge, t. However, Reid's nativism is considerably more substantial, because he lists the innate principles, by which we acquire many beliefs and notions, which we couldn't acquire solely by means of experience (that is, without the principles).

[4] See, for example, EIP 69, 238-239, 420 or 483 for places of these discussions.

has a much easier case against Locke's rejection of nativism. Reid observes that what we experience is not what we form beliefs about and conceptions of. By means of experience, we acquire notions and beliefs about things that we don't experience.[5]

> It may be observed, that experience can show a connection between a sign, and the thing signified by it, in those cases only, where both the sign and thing signified are perceived, and have always been perceived in conjunction. But if there be any case where the sign only is perceived, experience can never shew its connection with the thing signified. Thus, for example, thought is a sign of a thinking principle or mind. But how do we know that thought cannot be without a mind. If any man should say that he knows this by experience, he deceives himself. [...] The mind is not an immediate object either of sense or of consciousness. We may therefore justly conclude, that the necessary connection between thought and a mind, or thinking being, is not learned from experience. (EIP 508)

Ironically, it is Reid's strict limitation to the empirical method that allows him to evade the trap he thinks the empiricists have built themselves: to settle prior to all enquiry to only accept what is directly perceived. In Reid's eyes, the empiricists think that only ideas are perceived directly, which invites the sceptical question of how we know that there is anything beyond the ideas. In contrast to this, Reid doesn't put forward a priori constraints to filter our observations. The result is that Reid can acknowledge, by means of observation, sources of beliefs and notions that lie beyond observation. Thus, he finds that we have a notion of minds, and beliefs about minds, but we never perceive minds. We have a notion of necessity, and believe that some things are necessary, but we never perceive necessity. What forced Hume to conclude that, our ideas of minds and necessity are products of custom or our imagination (because he didn't find the impressions these ideas were copied from), amounts, for Reid, to a false dichotomy. There is a source of notions and beliefs besides experience or imagination, namely

[5] Proponents of the way of ideas are also aware of that phenomenon, although they explain it by means of ideas, which are directly experienced, and that which they represent, which isn't directly experienced, but about which we can have beliefs. Reid rejects the existence of ideas, but respects the phenomenon.

innate principles that yield notions and beliefs.

The quoted passage already introduces the talk of signs and things signified. This is Reid's way to capture his observation that there is a gap between what we directly experience and what we conceive and believe (and, for that matter, perceive, remember, etc.). Before we continue, though, it is important to understand that Reid's focus is not on metaphysics, but on the mind. He does claim that the connection between sign and thing signified is established by nature, but often, the relation holds between mental entities, not physical ones.

Reid distinguishes four different classes of signs. On one hand, there are artificial signs, which are not further differentiated, and on the other hand, three kinds of natural signs. Artificial signs are signs in virtue of social conventions, Reid's prime example being language. This is not to say that everything about our languages is arbitrary, because Reid thinks there are important *natural* presuppositions. As we have seen in the second chapter, Reid thinks that language conforms to our innate beliefs and notions, so much that he thinks we can carefully extract some of those innate beliefs by observing shared structures of grammar in all spoken languages.

On the side of the natural signs we do find objective relations. The first class comprises cases where sign and thing signified are connected by nature, like fire and smoke, and where this connection has to be learned. He specifies that the relation is not necessary, and, because no agents are involved, not causal. Reid settles at describing the relation as constant conjunction. However, if we shortly engage in one of the thought-experiments of Reid, to imagine subjects that are differently constituted (for example, Reid's idomeniens, beings that don't perceive the third dimension), it immediately appears that signhood is not independent of our constitution. For beings who don't see or smell, smoke wouldn't be a sign of fire, but heat might be. The constant conjunction of two events is then a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one for one to be a sign, and the other to be signified by it. It is partly in virtue of our constitution that the former is a sign of the latter, and beings with different constitutions would have different signs for different things. That Reid is even here concerned with a relation between sensations and beliefs is suggested by the (falsity of the) following passage:

> What we commonly call natural *causes* might, with more propriety, be called natural *signs*, and what we call *effects*, the things

> signified. The causes have no proper efficiency or causality, as far as we know; and all we can certainly affirm, is, that nature hath established a constant conjunction between them and the things called their effects; and hath given to mankind a disposition to observe those connections, to confide in their continuance, and to make use of them for the improvement of our knowledge, and increase of our power. (IHM 59)

If this were true, fire would be a sign of smoke, and not *vice versa*. But in all his examples, as well as other general remarks (IHM 177-178), it is the other way around. Natural signs of the first class are the foundation of science, because these sensations yield the relevant scientific beliefs and notions, and thus lead us from the 'effects' to their 'causes', which we are looking for in many scientific endeavours.

Just as natural signs of the first class are taken to be the foundation of science, natural signs of the second class are taken to be the foundation of the fine arts, and natural signs of third class the foundation of common sense (IHM 61).

The second class comprises cases in which sign and thing signified are related by a constant conjunction, but where we learn about their connection via a natural principle rather than having to experience it: we immediately jump from experience of the sign to conceptions of and beliefs about the thing signified – provided we already have the required notions. This class accommodates the outward signs of thoughts and feelings, and Reid's examples feature children put into fright by a loud voice or soothed by a smile. The third class drops the last requirement and comprises cases in which we not only immediately jump to the thing signified, but where the required notions are also brought about by experiencing the sign. Following Van Cleve's (2015: 38 ff.) and Nichols' (2007a: 88) argumentation on how to distinguish the three classes,[6] the example of the frightened and soothed child requires prior acquisition of the notion in question by means of a natural sign of the third class. As soon as the infant has acquired the notion of being angry, for example by being angry itself, it will then immediately jump from expressions of anger to thinking that the relevant subject is angry. Prior to the acquisition of the notion of being angry, that is, prior to being angry itself,

[6] Both build on the same textual basis as I do, the chapter *Of natural signs* from the *Inquiry's* chapter on touch (IHM 58-61).

a loud voice is no natural sign of anger for the infant (but it still is a sign of something, for example danger). The prime difference, then, is that signs from the third class don't require prior experience of whatever is signified by the sign.

> A third class of natural signs comprehends those which, though we never before had any notion or conception of the thing signified, do suggest it or conjure it up, as it were, by a natural kind of magic. (IHM 60)

As we can see by the absence of explanation, this is simply the generalisation of his particular observations that we have thoughts about things we have never directly experienced. Reid describes the facts, but is silent as to why and how they occur. Rather than hypothesizing about causes, and ways in which this might happen, Reid simply describes what he finds.

Given his acknowledgement that some of our most important notions and beliefs are being 'conjured up by a natural kind of magic', it is no surprise that darkness is a recurring theme in Reid's work.

> We know, that when certain impressions are made upon our organs, nerves, and brain, certain corresponding sensations are felt, and certain objects are both conceived and believed to exist. But in this train of operations Nature works in the dark. We can neither discover the cause of any one of them, nor any necessary connection of one with another [...] (EIP 227)

It follows that we believe things, and can conceive things, while not knowing how we do or why we do. That is, Reid can partially answer questions as to what there is (namely, what beliefs, what notions), and he can generalize these findings into laws, recording what beliefs we will have upon what inputs, but he can't offer explanations that answer why- and how-questions: How our conception and belief of external objects is produced 'is hid in impenetrable darkness' (EIP 226).

As to the right approach to this darkness, Reid conceives the attempt to resolve it as a source of error. Instead, he recommends to accept that we can't know how we came by many of our notions and beliefs, and simply 'make the best use' of them.

> But his [i.e., the philosopher's] 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 know not how he came by it. It is no wonder that the pride of philosophy should lead some to invent vain theories, in order to account for this knowledge; and others, who see this to be impracticable, to spurn at a knowledge they cannot account for, and vainly attempt to throw it off, as a reproach to their understanding. But the wise and humble will receive it as the gift of Heaven, and endeavour to make the best use of it. (EIP 233)

I have just said that Reid can't answer certain why- and how-questions, but this, of course, depends upon what one takes an explanation to be: is our notion of explanations such that it requires causes in the *explanans*, or do laws suffice to explain phenomena – despite being mere generalisations of the phenomena we seek to explain? This is the underlying problem that fuels another debate, namely whether Reid is a mysterian, i.e., whether he thinks that 'the mind is in principle inexplicable within a wholly naturalist science' (Copenhaver 2006: 449). Copenhaver claims, that Reid treats the mind and matter alike.[7] Both mind and matter are inexplicable by causes, but we can describe the world of matter by laws, as Reid conceives Newton to have done, and this is the approach that Reid, therefore, chooses for the mind. This is no work about the nature of explanation, and it is irrelevant whether we hold fixed that explanations require causes, and take Reid to be unable to offer explanations, or whether we adopt a liberal stance towards the notion of explanation, allow for laws to feature in explanations, and therefore take Reid to offer us explanations without causes. Rather, let us follow Reid in simply stating the facts.

For the most part, Reid records observations and generalizes them into laws. Sometimes, he does propose the existence of causes, like the mind and its faculties. Additionally, he uses the notion of darkness to describe

[7] Tapper (2002: 518) and Nichols (2007a) disagree. The former on the grounds that Reid refers to causes as 'real existences', the latter on the grounds that Reid seems to apply Newtonianism only with regard to natural philosophy, while employing hypotheses in metaphysics. Nichols criticism is encapsulated in the following remark. 'When Reid takes solace in our "natural Conviction" that humans are agents of efficient causation, he is not conducting Newtonian philosophy. In this context Reid is appealing to the third of his contingent, common-sense first principles to take him where Newtonianism could not go' (Nichols 2007a: 243). But Reid considers Newton's rules to be principles of common sense, as well, and our principles are not hypotheses that take us where Newtonianism can't go, they yield irresistible beliefs that act as the framework within which we *de facto* have to conduct our science (as a result of their irresistibility and psychological necessity).

our inability to find the causes of many of our beliefs and notions, including those of external objects, and advises humility in accepting this situation. There would be no humility if there were no place for causes in our science. Instead, humility enters the picture precisely because we settle for something less, albeit something that is befitting our place in the world (in Reid's eyes).[8]

As a result, I occupy the middle ground in this debate about Reid's mysterianism. Reid conceives himself to be a scientist of the mind, and, at least *in some sense*, faculties and the mind feature in explanations, for example, of the phenomenon of having beliefs (just as darkness does. We know that the faculties play a role, and we know the output, but the remaining space, how a faculty does what it does, is covered in darkness). Whether this is enough to contradict Copenhaver need not concern us here. The important point is that he doesn't think this project to be impossible. On these grounds, Reid is no mysterian. But, according to Reid, the science of the mind involves some unanswerable questions, and the right approach is to realize the limits of our ability, and to settle for what lies in our power to find out. In bringing in notions of humility and darkness, Reid shows that he takes these questions to be important, and the science of mind to be necessarily incomplete.

We have learned about his motivation, ends and means. We have now come into contact with some core tenets of his philosophy of mind. Given that Reid is in the business of description more than he is in positing causes, I will complete this sketch by laying out the resulting ontology of the mind.

First and foremost, Reid is a dualist, meaning that he takes non-material entities to exist besides the material world and its objects. The mental realm is populated by the mind, its faculties and their operations. In chapter 4, I will argue that some of the things Reid calls 'principles' also belong into this realm, rather than being descriptions thereof.

Reid conceives the mind, soul or thinking principle to be active rather than passive: The mind 'is from its very nature, a living and active being. Everything we know of it implies life and active energy' (EIP 21). It is equipped with powers, or faculties (the term Reid uses for our original

[8]This reading acknowledges the meaning 'humility' has in its Christian context, that is, as seeing oneself for what one truly is. Given that Reid frames beliefs as 'gifts of Heaven' in the same sentence, I feel justified in doing so.

powers, contrasting with habits, which are not original), and these are responsible for our mental operations, by which Reid understands 'every mode of thinking of which we are conscious' (EIP 20).

Talk of faculties is wide-spread among Reid's peers, but Reid, contrary to most of them, considers faculties to be real and irreducible. He individuates them by their intentional objects, for he takes memory to have a past event as its objects, whereas perception can only take objects that supposedly exist in the present. This way of individuation is not open to Reid's contemporaries. As they are proponents of the way of ideas, they know ideas as the sole intentional objects. This renders any attempts at individuation by means of their objects impossible (or leads to there being only one faculty, for there is only one type of object we can individuate with).

Whereas intentionality is important when it comes to faculties and their operations, sensations are mental acts that lack intentionality altogether.

> Pain of every kind is an uneasy sensation. When I am pained, I cannot say that the pain I feel is one thing, and that my feeling it, is another thing. They are one and the same thing, and cannot be disjoined, even in imagination. Pain, when it is not felt, has no existence. It can be neither greater nor less in degree or duration, nor any thing else in kind, that it is felt to be. It cannot exist by itself, nor in any subject, but in a sentient being. No quality of an inanimate insentient being can have the least resemblance to it. (EIP 37)

Sensations, rather than being about something, play an important role as signs, especially as signs of the third class. Sensations suggest to us the most basic qualities. Our constitution, and more precisely, the principles that are part of our constitution, respond to them by conjuring up the notions we need to even think about basic qualities, like hardness.

> The notion of hardness in bodies, as well as the belief of it, are got in a similar manner; being, by an original principle of our nature, annexed to that sensation which we have when we feel a hard body. And so naturally and necessarily does the sensation convey the notion and belief of hardness, that hitherto they have been confounded by the most acute inquirers into the principles of human nature, although they appear, upon accurate reflection,

> not only to be different things, but as unlike as pain is to the point of a sword. (IHM 60)

Pressing our hand on a tabletop is accompanied by a sensation, to which a principle of our constitution responds by producing a notion of hardness, and a belief that the table, which we take to be responsible for the sensation, is hard.

This concludes our brief advance into Reid's philosophy of mind, so that we are now better prepared to set up the three theses, starting with the first, that there are, for Reid, beliefs that are immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary.

3.2 Belief

I have already begun to explain my thesis that we should understand Reid as a descriptive psychologist by taking recourse to his theory of belief. As with other central notions Reid employs, he refrains from giving any kind of definition and this applies to his characterisation of belief as well. That is, because the operation signified by 'belief' is 'perfectly simple and of its own kind' and because 'belief' is a common word that is well understood (EIP 227).

A certain class of beliefs, among them certain perceptual beliefs, are immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary. As to the source of such beliefs, we can at least say that being suggested by a natural sign of the third class is a sufficient condition for having all three properties in question. One hint that this is so is that Reid takes the third class of natural signs to be the foundation of common sense, which is also associated with the properties in question (IHM 61).

The next sections lay out the three properties in question. Thereupon follows the discussion of contrary evidence. Lastly, a few comments round off the discussion of the first thesis, in which I explain why I think this is more important than has been acknowledged until now.

3.2.1 Immediate, Irresistible, Psychologically Necessary

The first property that we are taking a look at is immediacy, which we have already come across in our discussion of Reid's theory of signs. There we

learned that upon, for example, having a sensation, our mind produces some beliefs (and conceptions) immediately, without any cognitive in-between steps happening. The first conscious mental operation following the sensation is the belief (and conception).

In the following example, where Reid explains what it means that some beliefs are immediate, we are dealing presumably with a natural sign of the first class, for we had to learn that a coach passing by makes a certain sound.

> When I hear a certain sound, I conclude immediately without reasoning, that a coach passes by. There are no premises from which this conclusion is inferred by any rules of logic. It is the effect of a principle of nature, common to us with the brutes. (IHM 50)

Recall that Reid's theory of signs is just the generalization of his observation that the mind has beliefs about and conceptions of things we haven't directly experienced. And there is no chain of reasoning that links the experience to the belief, either. We experience pain, and immediately conceive an object, which is wholly unlike the pain, and believe it to be the source of it (usually the one we take to be the source of it, because we saw the pin pricking us, because we heard something before it hit us, or because we remember that last time it was this that felt like it).

As to the production of such beliefs, we are back to the motif of darkness. Reid describes the phenomena, but can't give explanations as to why sensations suggest beliefs to us.

> 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. (IHM 74)

This leaves us two things that we can learn about it: first, immediacy implies a temporal aspect of the belief – it is produced instantaneous – and secondly, albeit it is a negative characterisation only, regarding the belief's genesis, immediacy implies that there were no premises involved, no reasoning, no inferring, no argumentation.

Lastly, one might wonder about the frequency, and in turn, the extent of the role such beliefs play in our lives. Reid's finding is that such beliefs are pervasive, and that many of our most important beliefs – as regards practical life and philosophy – are immediate, as well. Hence the connection between common sense and beliefs that exhibit the three properties in question.

> I know moreover, that this belief [in a perceived object's present existence] is not the effect of argumentation and reasoning; it is the immediate effect of my constitution. (IHM 168)

Of course, not only does the belief in a perceived object's present existence play an important role in our day-to-day lives, it is also the object of philosophical debate.

The second property in question is irresistibility. By saying that certain beliefs are irresistible, Reid means that it is beyond our power to lay them off. Reid need not hold that every belief is irresistible, and I only require that certain beliefs are. Likewise, he need not hold that it is impossible that this belief is ever lost. He merely claims that we have no direct power of them, meaning that they are not subject to our will.[9]

> [I]t is not in my power [to get rid of my belief in external objects]: why then should I make a vain attempt? It would be agreeable to fly to the moon, and to make a visit to Jupiter and Saturn; but when I know that Nature has bound me down by the law of gravitation to this planet which I inhabit, I rest contented, and quietly suffer myself to be carried along in its orbit. My belief is carried along by perception, as irresistibly as my body by the earth. And the greatest sceptic will find himself to be in the same condition. (IHM 169)

Not only does this quotation express that at least our perceptual beliefs are irresistible, it implies that the attempt to lay them off is as absurd as the attempt to fly to the moon.[10] Furthermore, Reid is clear about the fact that this isn't a peculiar feature of his mental life. At least those beliefs

[9] Compare EAP 31: '[T]hey are not done by our power. How do we know this? Because they are not subject to our will. This is the infallible criterion by which we distinguish what is our doing from what is not; what is in our power from what is not.'

[10] Passages such as the one quoted here are fairly common; see, for example, IHM 36, 58, 76 and EIP 46, 481, 515, 571.

that are irresistible *and* natural are irresistible even for the greatest sceptic. Beliefs that result from artificial signs might still be irresistible, but not everyone will have learned the same artificial signs (such beliefs wouldn't be psychologically necessary, as the next paragraph explains). Finally, the passage reiterates Reid's attitude towards such irresistible beliefs, namely to accept the situation, rest contented, and, presumably, focus on things we have power about. That some beliefs are irresistible will later be used as a building block of my argument that the beliefs yielded by common sense and its first principles are not adequate objects of justification (or blame). The other half of the argument is based on evidence that Reid refrains from normative assessments in the realm of necessity and will be supplied in chapter 5.1.

Lastly, I included, as a third property, their psychological necessity. This is to capture that, not only are we unable to lay them off once we have them, we are unable to resist having or acquiring them, as well. According to Reid, as long as we are not properly ill, or so young that the we can't be sure whether the beliefs are already in place, we will have these beliefs, as a necessary result of our constitution. (This is not to say that God couldn't have given us a different constitution.) This fact, again, is reflected in Reid's talk of natural signs. Here, though, we highlight the fact that constitutions don't vary, and that, therefore, it is true of all humans all the time (with the above exceptions) that they jump from certain signs to belief and conception of the thing signified. There is, then, a slight conditionalisation involved, in that having these beliefs and notions is conditional upon having had the relevant sensations. Practically speaking, everyone will have had the relevant sensations, and therefore, everyone will have the relevant notions and beliefs, such that there is, in Reid's terminology, a 'common sense of mankind'. In what follows, I will often speak about adults, assuming that they have already experienced all relevant sensations, and thus, dispense with explicitly expressing the conditional nature of having the relevant notions and beliefs.

> These judgements may, in the strictest sense, be called *judgements of nature*. Nature has subjected us to them whether we will or not. They are neither got, nor can they be lost by any use or abuse of our faculties; and it is evidently necessary for our preservation that it should be so. For if belief in our senses and in our memory were to be learned by culture, the race of

> men would perish before they learned this lesson. It is necessary to all men for their being and preservation, and therefore is unconditionally given to all men by the Author of Nature. (EIP 412)

Although this quotation is a nice rendering of the psychological necessity of certain beliefs, it also includes elements that lend themselves to an epistemological interpretation. So, a reliabilist interpreter could argue that Reid here links our beliefs' necessity for our preservation or survival with truth or justification, or interpret this as proposing a so-called track-record arguments: If they have brought us this far, that is, if they have such a good track-record of delivering, then we are justified in them – ignoring, for a moment, that it is an open question just what they deliver. Proponents think they deliver truth, critics think they might as well deliver beliefs that bring about success, but which might be false nonetheless. And the same is true for evolutionary arguments. It is questionable that having true beliefs is furthering evolutionary fitness (at least in any relevant measure), just as it is that subjects endowed with processes of belief-formation that yield true beliefs are ones which have a better chance at survival.[11]

Reid might even think that success indicates truth, just for matters of talking with the vulgar. Normal people don't care for brains in vats or other philosophical fancies, and that is reflected in their notions of truth and justification. To give you an example, Reid thinks that the sceptic's success in acting without hurting himself reveals that he, too, has the true beliefs he claims are false. If we brought Reid into the epistemological class room, a room he has currently no interest in being in, he would say that our beliefs are true and that we could be brains in vats. Neither the one nor the other bear any significance for what Reid is interested in: the science of the human mind. The purpose of the science of the human mind is to make us more successful, among other things. Despairing about our inability to

[11] Furthermore, we would want a causal link between the process and survival, to exclude the possibility that being endowed with such a process is linked with some other trait that is truly responsible for the heightened grade of fitness. All these points have been already discussed by other, more able, philosophers. De Bary (2002), whom we will discuss throughout this work (and in detail in 6.2) offers an interpretation that takes Reid to offer track-record arguments, and discusses the surrounding issues in much detail (his chapter 9 opens with a section on Reid's alleged track-record arguments). For more detail on the evolutionary argument, see Plantinga (1993: 219ff.), who discusses these even with reference to Reid, as well as Todd's (1996) comments thereof.

demonstrate that scepticism is false is not only pointless, but contrary to that aim, just as attempting to disproof the sceptic is.[12]

To bring this excursion to an end, take another close look at the passage. If we dissect it, we get the following pieces. Everyone will have these beliefs, and we can't get rid of them. They are evidently necessary for our preservation. For this reason, God has given them to us. Notions such as truth, justification or knowledge do not feature in the passage. While an epistemic interpretation might cohere with the contents of the passage, it in no way forces any epistemic point upon a neutral reader. For this reason, and because we will later see that Reid is not in the business of formulating an epistemology, we will now continue, and discuss some passages that initially seem to sit oddly with what we have seen so far regarding the first thesis.

3.2.2 Contrary Evidence?

I want to spend a brief moment to discuss contrary evidence, so that it doesn't bother us downstream. It isn't the case that the passages we will discuss below have been taken to suggest that Reid doesn't think that there are beliefs that are immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary. But they could feature in an explanation of why other interpreters didn't take what Reid is saying to be as important as I indicated.[13] Furthermore, they help to clarify, or maybe complete, the picture that begins to take form here.

Three sources come to mind that suggest that belief isn't as irresistible and psychologically necessary as Reid suggested in the passages above. On one occasion in the *Inquiry*, Reid talks about Pyrrho as being a successful follower of his own doctrine, that is, of suspending all belief. Next, in his discussion of Bacon's *idola tribus*, he seems to suggest that the tenth principle, which states our reliance on testimony, is kept in check by reason. This suggests that, contrary to his assurances, the beliefs suggested by the

[12] That is why the parallel to Wittgenstein is illuminating. Reid's beliefs that are immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary are akin to Wittgenstein's *Weltbild*, the frame within which we are able to judge what is true or false, itself never the object of evaluation, objectively certain, and most importantly, as the example of the moon-expedition shows, susceptible to be ultimately false.

[13] One recent example is Siscoe (2022), who formulates an internalist account of Reid that focusses heavily on testimony and being free from prejudice.

tenth principle are not irresistible. Lastly, there is an unpublished essay entitled *Of Power*, which likewise seems to suggest that reason is able to influence our inductive beliefs, which are also the product of one of the first principles. Therefore, we now take a closer look at each of these instances.

In the *Inquiry*, Reid tells the reader about Pyrrho, who was so successful in suspending most beliefs that his attendants had to keep him out of trouble. This could be taken as evidence that it is possible to resist these beliefs. But the story is taken from Diogenes Laertius,[14] who credits it to Antigonus the Carystian. Reid's retelling the story is conditional on the story being true ('[...] for if we may believe Antigonus [...]' (IHM 20)). Additionally, just some paragraphs later, he follows up with a story in which Pyrrho got angry at a cook and pursued him, spit in hand, into the market-place.[15]

According to Reid's view on the relation of belief and action, Pyrrho, in the second story, must have had some belief as to the qualities of the cook in question, whereas the first story tells that 'his life corresponded to his doctrine' (IHM 20). These, then, are contradicting stories. The context is a series of polemics against Hume, lending the possibility that Reid is not perfectly serious at that moment. Therefore, I find their supposed evidence to be outweighed by Reid's comments on the irresistibility of certain beliefs.[16]

More interesting, and a chance to clarify the way Reid thinks about beliefs, are a couple of passages which suggest that reason can correct opinions. Take, as a proxy, this instance in which Reid says that 'surely it is the province of reason to correct wrong opinions, and to lead us into those that are just and true' (EAP 158).

Now, I never suggested that all beliefs are irresistible, so that the above sentiment is only interesting as it is applied to beliefs inhibiting our three properties. And indeed, after the enumeration of first principles, Reid goes on to talk about Bacon's *idola tribus* – universal sources of error among mankind. They are the same across mankind, because they arise from the way we are constituted, including having the same first principles (EIP 528).

[14]Brookes identifies the quotation as stemming from Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, DL IX, 11, 62.

[15]Brookes (IHM 222) points out that in Laertius' *Lives* it is an attendant of Pyrrho, Eurylochos, and not Pyrrho himself, see DL IX, 11, 69.

[16]The same goes for those passages in which Reid records that even Hume himself acknowledged that he was only temporarily able to sustain his scepticism (EIP 46).

The first of these that Reid talks about is about the threat of giving too much credence to testimony: 'Men are prone to be led too much by authority in their opinions' (EIP 528). This should be contrasted with the first principle addressing the same issue.

> 10. Another first principle appears to me to be, That there is a certain regard due to human testimony in matters of fact, and even to human authority in matters of opinion. (EIP 487)

We will discuss the principles and how to understand them in more detail below, but the picture that emerges is the following. The tenth principle is, as are all the others, self-evident, which implies immediacy, irresistibility and psychological necessity (as argued in 3.4). As the discussion of the tenth principle reveals, Reid thinks that infants and children believe whatever they are being told. Limited to this group, everything is fine. But there comes a point at which people start to discriminate between different sources of testimony and situations in which testimony is given. If a source continually gives bad advice, this experience will limit the application of the tenth principle. Likewise, in situations in which the subject takes the others to be joking, the principle will not produce beliefs. In what sense, then, is the principle still irresistible?[17]

> But when our faculties ripen, we find reason to check that propensity to yield to testimony and authority, which was so necessary and so natural in the first period of life. We learn to reason about the regard due to them, and it to be a childish weakness to lay more stress upon them than reason justifies. Yet, I believe, to the end of life, most men are more apt to go into this extreme than into the contrary; and the natural propensity still retains some force. (EIP 488)[18]

[17] Besides the passage quoted here, Reid also affirms, in the same context, that 'authority may add weight to one scale; but the man holds the balance, and judges what weight he ought to allow to authority' (EIP 528). This also supports the idea that, with regard to testimony, there comes a point at which we can influence the extent to which testimony affects our judgement. As I point out below, Reid at no point suggests that this carries over to the other, more robust, principles. Siscoe (2022: 10) attempts to distinguish irresistible from involuntary beliefs. The latter are produced irrespective of my will, but they can be dropped, while irresistible beliefs are produced and continually believed irrespective of my will. I take it to be another way to soften this particular problem of the principle of testimony and Reid's comments as to our ability to influence it.

[18] Reid later clarifies that he judges it to be good that human nature tends to lean to the extreme of too much trust rather than too little (EIP 529).

As I will argue in chapter 4, Reid doesn't clearly distinguish between the principles themselves, and the beliefs they give rise to. In this case, the most plausible way would be to think that the principle is irresistible, in the sense that I can't lay off the belief that we do rely on human testimony in matters of fact and opinion, but for each of its particular deliverances, it is no more true that they are irresistible (but it was up to some age).

It should also be pointed out that it isn't obvious that this carries over to the other principles and their beliefs, and Reid never suggests that it does carry over. Therefore, although irresistibility associated with the principle on testimony is a bit murky, this leaves untouched the fact that the following beliefs are wholly irresistible in Reid's eyes: That I have the thoughts of which I am conscious, that these thoughts belong to my mind, that what I remember did really happen, that I have existed through time, that perceived objects really exist, and so on.

All three properties are direct consequences of the way we are constituted. If something interferes with that constitution (like illness or injury), or if it evolves (say, from infancy to adulthood), beliefs might lose or gain properties. Beings with other constitutions, likewise, might have no irresistible beliefs, or many more. This is another way of saying that, while the principles and their beliefs are not subject to our will, they don't operate in a vacuum. For better illustration, consider a clock. We can't will it to show a certain time or run faster or slower. But we can put it into our orbit to fasten it, or place it on a heavy planet to slow it. We can break it, or damage it such that it doesn't work properly any more. Just as we can become mentally or physically ill, injure ourselves, take drugs or poisons, deprive ourselves of sleep and so on. Reid, however, is interested not in how to break our principles. He is operating at a much earlier stage and finds that there is already much to be gained from simply stating what principles are operating within our constitution.

With regard to testimony, then, adults can't resist trusting generally, although they are able to resist trust in each singular case,[19] whereas children are unable to resist trust in singular cases as well. Therefore, irresistibility can be lost. Still, most other principles remain irresistible throughout our lives. There are potentially ways to influence them, like illness, injuries,

[19]Reid lists some factors that lead to a great reliance on testimony, including experience, indifference about truth, party-zeal, vanity, desire of victory, and laziness (EIP 529).

sleep-deprivation, drugs or poison, but this is besides the point that we can't wilfully change or suspend them.[20]

Lastly, there is an unpublished essay of Reid, *Of Power*, which features the following passage:

> Our instinctive belief of what is to happen would often and does often lead us into mistakes, though highly necessary before we have the use of reason, and when we learn to reason we regulate this belief by just rules of induction. But the rules of induction, or of reasoning from experience, do not produce the belief of what is to come, they serve only to regulate and restrain it. In like manner our reasoning about testimony serves only to restrain and regulate the unlimited belief which we have in it by nature. (OP 8)

The reasoning seems to be the same as in the case of testimony, although the point here is even weaker. Opponents of my view would have to stress the occurrence of 'we' in the first sentence, since it could be taken to suggest that we actively, wilfully regulate our beliefs. The second sentence, to the contrary, shifts the subject from the agent to the rules or the operation. Of course our experience, as well as other beliefs we have, influence in which instances particular beliefs are formed. Another analogy to the discussion of testimony is that both principles are more likely to produce false beliefs than the others. And false beliefs, as soon as we recognize their falsity, produce experiences that influence what we will believe in the future. Again, then, this doesn't carry over to such beliefs as that we have the thoughts we think we have or that we have a mind. We never experience that they are wrong, even if they ultimately were wrong. For these reasons, and because we don't know why it hasn't been included in one of his published works, I continue to hold that there are irresistible, immediate and psychologically necessary beliefs.[21]

[20] It is only the first of the *idola tribus* that is interesting in this regard. The other sources of error that Reid mentions are not obviously counterparts to the principles, like our tendency to use analogical reasoning, to jump from one extreme to the opposite extreme, to apply our intellect to things not suited for it or to simplify things.

[21] This whole section should be contrasted with such remarks of Reid as the following: 'It is not in our power to judge as we will' (EIP 452), or, in a letter to James Gregory (dated 30th July 1789): 'I cannot but agree with you that assent or belief is not a voluntary act. Neither is seeing when the eyes are open. One may voluntarily shut his bodily

3.2.3 Round Off

Barring repetition, it is important to understand the severity of what Reid says: There are beliefs that each and everyone of us will have. We can't resist acquiring them, and we are unable to lay them off (excepting the above mentioned exceptions). As such, we have a fixed frame within which we operate mentally and physically. Whenever we act, those beliefs will play their part, and we have to act upon them, no matter what our attitude towards them is. This is important in two ways.

First, this lets us predict the beliefs and action of our fellow humans, and it is the reason why those predictions usually are successful. Reid is operating with descriptive notions, such as predictive beliefs or trusted beliefs. He doesn't question whether the beliefs we necessarily trust are also *trustworthy*. The fact that we correctly predict the behaviour of others is also a key feature of Reid's notion of common sense, as we will see later.

Another implication is that, because Reid holds that we can't believe contradictions, there are literally unbelievable propositions, including such sceptical ones as the denials of our perceptions. We have already surveyed some statements of his attitude towards beliefs we necessarily have, i.e. humble acceptance, and so the question is: Is Reid overly concerned about unbelievable propositions, or is he generally disinterested in them? I find the evidence already covered favours the latter option, but we will also discuss the matter in more detail in chapter 5. Just as there is no ethics of impossible actions, why should there be an epistemology of unbelievable propositions, and why would Reid, of all philosophers, be the one to champion it?

Another reason why what Reid says here is so important lies in the fact that belief, in Reid's eyes, is ubiquitous. He thinks that belief accompanies or makes up most mental operations we perform, the exception being simple apprehension. Most operations involve belief and conception: In memory, we believe the conceived object to have existed, and in perception, that it exists externally and right now. (Conception provides the belief with its object. If the conceived object is a tree, the belief will say that there exists a tree like the conceived one.)[22]

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eyes, and perhaps the eye of his understanding. [...] But as light may be so offensive that the bodily eye is shut involuntarily, may not something similar happen to the eye of the understanding, when brought to a light too offensive to some favourite prejudice or passion, to be endured?' (C 208).

[22]Nichols (2007b: 34) takes this to be a radical way of over-intellectualizing the mind,

> So large a share has belief in our intellectual operations, in our active principles, and in our actions themselves, that as faith in things divine is represented as the main spring in the life of a Christian, so belief in general is the main spring in the life of a man. (EIP 228)

And a portion of these beliefs will be immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary.

3.3 Perception

The next thesis that I am going to argue for is that perception for Reid is non-factive. By this I mean that for Reid perceiving that p does not entail that p is true. The structure of this section is three-part. First, I will go through the basics of Reid's theory of perception.[23] Secondly, I will present arguments for the view that perception is factive, both generally and with regard to Reid. Thirdly, I will present arguments against the view that perception is factive, but only concerning Reid.

The first important feature of Reid's approach to perception is that he thinks that we must focus on the being that perceives, not the organ by which it does (EIP 73). The eye doesn't see anything, but we see by means of the eye. A related point is made when he tells us that perception is 'solely an act of the mind', known by us through the testimony of consciousness, and not of sense (EIP 96). Focusing solely on the evidence of consciousness, Reid finds that perception is nothing over and above immediate and irresistible conception and belief in some thing's present and external existence:

> [W]e shall find in [perception] these three things: *First*, Some conception or notion of the object perceived; *Secondly*, A strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence; and,

meaning that this feature of Reid's theory of belief is at odds with common sense and fails to agree with our psychological reality. His solution is to weaken Reid's demand that *all* beliefs can be expressed by a proposition that affirms or denies something. He imposes a distinction between wide and narrow uses of 'belief' on the text: Every conscious or non-conscious mental state can be a wide belief, even those that do not affirm something, whereas narrow beliefs are those in which the agent affirms a proposition.

[23] For a more detailed account, see Nichols (2002) or (2007b). The former, although only an article, is especially helpful, because Nichols connects the discussion of Reid's theory of perception with our concerns whether Reid is proposing a normative epistemology or not.

> *thirdly*, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (EIP 96)

As with the notion of belief above, Reid describes the result of his observations and experiments. Whenever he perceives, he finds these operations to be present, and only these.[24]

If we compare this account of perception with the standard definition of knowledge, we immediately see a difference with regard to their state as being hybrid/homogeneous. Knowledge, on most accounts, is factive, because a part of what makes some agent know that p is that p is true. In an ascription of knowledge, therefore, we not only talk about a mental state, but about a world-state as well (and thus we need access to both). This is not the case with Reidian perception, as the parts he enumerates are all mental states. This reading is further supported by Reid claiming that the act of perception is solely mental. All of which points towards it being the case that we could determine whether an agent perceives something by his mental states alone. That is why he says that perception is known by us through the testimony of consciousness alone. If perception were factive, we would need the testimony of sense, as well. Furthermore, since neither conception nor belief are factive, it is at least very unclear why perception should be factive.[25]

3.3.1 Reasons for the Factivity of Perception

Before going into the details and reasoning against the factivity of perception, let us consider reasons *for* perception being factive. A rehearsal of these will help to locate Reid intellectually, by seeing that there is an alternative. By noting that this alternative is for many the default view, we can also understand better why Reid is commonly interpreted along these lines. Cummins (1974: 320), in an article that also tries to establish that

[24] Nichols (2007b: 27) quotes Ben Zeev (1986: 105) approvingly in this regard, the latter explaining that 'these cognitive features are expressive of the perception itself, and are not an additional, separate process'.

[25] De Bary (2002: 59) makes a similar observation, although I don't share his view that what we have here is a definition or analysis of perception: 'to say that X perceives Y is to say that X has a conception of and a belief in the current existence of an external object Y. And it is obvious that the analysis is comprehensive enough to include misperceptions – since "simple apprehensions" can have non-existent objects, and since beliefs can so plainly be false as well as true, the analysis might be said to be tailor-made to cope with illusory or delusive as well as veridical perceptual experience.'

Reidian perception is not factive,[26] mentions three independent reasons why many take perception to be factive. First, we are oftentimes unwilling to ascribe a perception to someone if we (think we) know the allegedly perceived object to not exist. Secondly, most of our knowledge is acquired by means of perception. If perception is not factive, our knowledge stands in need of an explanation we otherwise did have. Thirdly, there is a systematic way of answering objections involving counterexamples in that the failure of perception can be explained away by a failure of inference. Consider the apparent perception of a window in the wall. Unbeknownst to the perceiver, the window is painted unto the wall. This, and similar cases, can be disarmed by claiming that the perception is still factive, while locating the error at the inference based on that perception. One only perceives what is really there, the picture of a window, but infers wrong things from these perceptions, that there is a real window in the wall. Note that this requires that the inference not be part of the perception.

The above three points are reasons to think that perception is factive independently of Reid's position or arguments regarding his position. Their purpose is to show that this is a contested matter, and that it isn't obvious that perception is not factive. As such, the above reasons help to locate Reid's position. Finally, they are also challenges to be met by anyone claiming that perception is not factive.

Many Reid-scholars do think that Reidian perception is factive. As we will engage with other interpretations in the coming chapters, detailed discussions of this matter is located there as well. Generally speaking, there are three groups of reasons to think that Reidian perception is factive. First, some interpreters find errors in Reid's theory and try to remedy them by interpreting perception as factive. One example of this is Nichols (2007b: 34), who disagrees with Reid on the question of the presence of beliefs in illusions. Reid thinks that when we have an illusion of an apple, we will necessarily believe that there is an apple. Nichols disagrees, presumably because he thinks that it is possible to refrain from such a belief when we

[26] In Cummins' own terms, he argues for the thesis that perception is no E-relation, where an E-relation requires both relata to exist. Although he finds ample evidence of perception being no E-relation, at the end he fails to see how this could cohere with the fifth first principle. In the course of his argument he explores three strategies to remedy this: that perception is factive, that distinct perception is factive, or that Reid is a naturalized epistemologist (much along the lines of this dissertation). Cummins discards all three of these. We will discuss his reasons in due time.

know that it is an illusion (he doesn't say why he disagrees). This saves Reid insofar as Nichols can now agree that there is necessarily belief in perception, but not necessarily in illusions.[27] Secondly, there are less innocent reasons. Some Reid-scholars acknowledge the evidence that perception is not factive, but because this would ultimately threaten their interpretation, they discard, explain away or reinterpret the evidence in their favour. This strategy wouldn't work were it not for the third reason. The third reason is that there is, although meagre as it may be, evidence that perception is factive in Reid's writing.

There are at least two sources on which interpreters can rely in claiming that Reid thought that perception is factive. The most obvious is the fifth first principle, 'that those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be' (EIP 476). If we read it isolated like that, it does appear to assert the factivity of perception. Another, though much less cited, passage in Reid's writing is one where he distinguishes between seeming and real perception.

> Where, then, lies the deceit? I answer, it lies not in the sensation, which is real, but in the seeming perception he had of a disorder in his toe. This perception, which Nature had conjoined with the sensation, was in this instance fallacious.[...] [I]n these, and other like cases, the sensations we have are real, and the deception is only in the perception which Nature has annexed to them. (EIP 214)

It is, as far as I'm aware, the only time Reid distinguishes between seeming and (presumably) real perception. The passage is also odd, because Reid calls the perception fallacious, whereas on other occasions, he holds that perception is fallible but not fallacious. Additionally, he says the perception contains a deception, which, on the factivist reading, shouldn't happen.

One way to incorporate it would be through acknowledging that Reid discusses a case of phantom pain – the example is of a 'man who feels pain

[27] It is an odd moment in Nichols' book, because, as a book about Reid's theory of perception, one wouldn't expect such a light-hearted commitment to the factivity of perception, without much discussion. One would expect it to be a result of a chain of arguments or of textual evidence, not a quick fix to a small problem occurring in the introduction: 'However, he can respond by arguing that he uses "perception" as a success term. This would imply that, when I experience my first optical illusion, I do not, strictly speaking "perceive" any body of water' (Nichols 2007b: 34).

in his toe after the leg was cut off' (ibid.). That is, we have a subject who perceives pain in a limb he knows has been cut off. Given Reid's claim that we believe that the objects we perceive exist and exist like we perceive them to be, as captured by the fifth principle, we *treat* perception as factive. The subject of this example might want to highlight the fact that he knows that his toe is missing in reporting his perception, hence referring to it as a 'seeming perception'. Seeming perceptions are still perceptions, because arguably, they yield beliefs about the perceived objects, like cut off toes (resulting in the subject attempting to move them, to touch them, etc.), although they vanish as soon as the subject consciously accesses the fact, known to him throughout the course of these events, that his leg was cut off.

Therefore, because the passage is an outlier, on top of that one that can be dealt with, I don't think we should put much weight on it.

Before concluding this part about reasons to think that Reidian perception is factive, there is one more feature of Reid's view that initially looks like it could be employed in the service of claiming that perception is factive after all. Whereas there is only one occasion on which Reid speaks of seeming perception, he frames a lot of his talk about perception as it being more or less distinct. For example, the fifth principle is restricted to distinct perception: Only those things exist, and are what we perceive them to be, which we *distinctly* perceive by our senses. Accordingly, why not claim that distinct perception is factive and non-distinct perception is not? This would explain why the fifth principle can state the factivity of perception, while elsewhere Reid treats perception as non-factive. This would only work if it can be shown that distinct perception without an object is impossible according to Reid. In other words, Reid would have to draw the distinction between distinct perception and indistinct perception such that distinct perception is always veridical, and indistinct perception is not. Let us therefore explore what Reid understands by distinct and indistinct perception.

First of all, perceptions have degrees of distinctness. According to Reid, a distinct perception requires a distinct notion or conception of the perceived object.[28] According to the quote below, to form a distinct notion requires time. The senses, so to speak, deliver us an object instantly, but it takes some time to see the object as something.

[28] Reid uses notion and conception interchangeably, cf. EIP 226.

> A distinct notion of an object, even of sense, is never got in an instant; but the sense performs its office in an instant. Time is not required to see it better, but to analyse it, to distinguish the different parts, and their relation to one another, and to the whole. (EIP 418)

Performance of these tasks such as analysing an object, distinguishing its parts etc., involve the faculty of judgement. If the faculty of judgment is hindered, or busy with something else, no distinct notion ensues.

> Hence it is, that when any vehement passion or emotion hinders the cool application of judgement, we get no distinct notion of an object, even though the sense be long directed to it. A man who is put into a panic, by thinking he sees a ghost, may stare at it long, without having any distinct notion of it; it is his understanding, and not his sense that is disturbed by his horror. If he can lay that aside, judgement immediately enters upon its office, and examines the length and breadth, the colour, and figure, and distance of the object. Of these, while his panic lasted, he had no distinct notion, though his eyes were open all the time. (EIP 418)

Reid sums this up by saying that the senses can deliver gross and indistinct notions, but distinct notions require at least some degree of judgement.[29] While the unhindered operation of the faculty of judgement is necessary, it is not sufficient. The information of sense can lend themselves to be analysed and distinguished with regard to their parts and whole, but they can also fail to do so, with every shade of grey in between. This is why distinctness is a matter of degree. Just as it is relatively easy to acquire a distinct notion of an object under conditions of clear daylight, the less light, the less easy it will be to have a distinct notion. At some point, the notion will be wholly indistinct, and in total darkness, there will be no notion at

[29] As EIP 414 makes clear, Reid thinks that the office of judgement goes far beyond the application of notions: 'I add, in general, that, without some degree of judgement, we can form no accurate and distinct notions of things; so that, one province of judgement is, to aid us in forming clear and distinct conceptions of things, which are the only fit materials for reasoning.' See also his comments following this passage, comparing the role of conception and judgement in our infancy to the problem of the chicken and egg (EIP 415-416). In maturity, each judgement presupposes conception, and *vice versa*, but Reid claims no knowledge of how this plays out in the infant mind.

all. Additionally, the source of lacking distinctness need not be the external conditions. It could just as well be a property of the object, like its size or the amount of its details. If an object has an overwhelming amount of parts and details, most will have only an indistinct notion of it. The better trained someone is, and the more time is spent on analysing the object, the more distinct it will become. Thus, another property of the distinct/indistinct distinction is that it is subjective. Two subjects can have differing degrees of distinct perception of the same object, although the external conditions of both are the same.

> Thus we see more distinctly an object at a small than at a great distance. An object at a great distance is seen more distinctly in a clear than in a foggy day. An object seen indistinctly with the naked eye, on account of its smallness, may be seen distinctly with a microscope. The objects in this room will be seen by a person in the room less and less distinctly as the light of the day fails; they pass through all the various degrees of distinctness according to the degrees of light, and at last, in total darkness, they are not seen at all. (EIP 96-97)

Two questions remain: what about the distinctness of perception, as opposed to conceptions or notions? And what is the relationship between distinctness of notions to beliefs? Regarding the former question, because notions are part of every perception, their distinctness simply *is* the distinctness of that perception. Thus, when Reid says that a perception is distinct, that means that the notion involved is distinct, and *vice versa*. As to the question of belief, the problem is that Reid tells us at the seminal passages that perception features a strong and irresistible belief. But that doesn't conform to our psychological reality. Presumably Reid wants to hold that in distinct perception the belief is strong and irresistible. With regard to less distinct perceptions, it is both possible that the belief is strong, as when I strongly believe that there is something, although the details are not available to me, and that the belief is weak, as when I weakly believe that there is something because I lack the details. The resulting picture is that we can have strong beliefs with both distinct and indistinct notions, but we can't have distinct notions and weak beliefs.

> In perception we not only have a notion more or less distinct of

> the object perceived, but also an irresistible conviction and belief of its existence. This is always the case when we are certain that we perceive it. There may be a perception so faint and indistinct, as to leave us in doubt whether we perceive the object or not. Thus, when a star begins to twinkle as the light of the sun withdraws, one may, for a short time, think he sees it, without being certain, until the perception acquires some strength and steadiness. When a ship just begins to appear in the utmost verge of the horizon, we may at first be dubious whether we perceive it or not: But when the perception is in any degree clear and steady, there remains no doubt of its reality; and when the reality of the perception is ascertained, the existence of the object perceived can no longer be doubted. (EIP 97)

The closer the ship will move to us, up to a certain point, its distinctness will improve for us. And all the while we will perceive it. It would be misleading to take Reid to mean that whenever we perceive, no matter how indistinct the notion involved is, the belief will be strong and irresistible.

We began to explore the notion of distinctness because it looked like another possibility to interpret Reidian perception as factive. The fifth principle seems to state that distinctly perceived objects exist, so it is a natural thought to think that distinctness makes the difference between veridical and non-veridical perception. All this comes down to the question whether there are cases of distinct perception without a corresponding extra-mental object that it refers to. Well, why shouldn't there? Nothing that Reid says with regard to distinctness entails it being factive. The cases of perceptions without objects which I will present below are all such that they involve distinct perceptions, and, in some cases, even require that they are distinct. One of his examples is being fooled by a coin of counterfeit money. The viewing conditions are not part of the example, and we can assume that they are as good as they can be. Additionally, the coin is supposed to withstand our various tests like taste, texture, colour, weight etc. When we are fooled by a coin of counterfeit money, or a painting that looks three-dimensional, our notions are very distinct. If they were indistinct, we wouldn't be fooled. In the case of counterfeit money, I have a notion of a coin of real money, it being a good copy, the notion would be the same had I been presented with a real coin. My belief is strong and

irresistible, as it always is when I see everyday-objects. If I had a notion of counterfeit-money, I would believe that there is a coin of counterfeit money and therefore not be fooled in the first place. This being an example that Reid uses (EIP 244), I conclude that the distinct/non-distinct distinction is not suited to claim that distinct perception is factive.

In this last part of this section on perception, I will present three arguments for the view that perception is non-factive.[30] The first argument is that the textual evidence speaks against interpreting Reid as holding that perception is factive. I distinguish direct from indirect evidence. By 'direct evidence' I understand passages in which Reid commits himself to cases of perception without the relevant objects, whereas by 'indirect evidence', I understand passages in which Reid in general adopts stances that are inconsistent with perception being factive: his fallibilism and his reliance on ordinary language. In the second argument I argue that, if perception were factive, Reid could employ arguments in the style of G. E. Moore, merely pointing to perceptions to disprove scepticism and various forms of anti-realism. That he never does so is evidence that he didn't think perception is factive. The third argument makes the point that it is also inconsistent with his view that we have a grasp on whether we perceive or not. If perception is factive, then whether we perceive or not is in part dependent on the world, to which we have no access beyond perception. Introspection alone would not reveal whether we perceive, or whether we hallucinate. This can only be saved by claiming, on top of perception being factive, that Reid adopts externalism or disjunctivism. Forcing these views upon Reid is faced with more contrary textual evidence.

[30]There is also an argument due to Duggan (1978) that we will skip because I don't find it convincing. In a nutshell, it tries to exploit the fact that Reid places his fifth principle, that what we distinctly perceive exists and exists like we perceived it, on the list of contingent first principles, as opposed to the list of necessary ones. His reasoning is that if perception is factive, the negation of the principle is impossible. Therefore, the fifth principle is necessary and belongs on the list of necessary principles. Therefore, that it is on the list of contingent principles shows that Reid didn't think that perception is factive. The problem is that perception could be contingently factive. Reid is concerned with perception as a mental operation that we only learn about by observation, not as a theoretical notion to be given necessary and sufficient conditions. On Reid's view, the capacity for this operation is given to us by God, and he could have acted differently. Indeed, Reid is open to the possibility that other beings would be differently constituted with respect to perception.

3.3.2 Textual Evidence Against the Factivity of Reidian Perception

This first argument collects direct and indirect evidence for the claim that Reid didn't think that perception is factive. We will consider his general fallibilism[31] and his reliance on ordinary language as instances of indirect evidence. With regard to fallibilism, Reid commits himself to the thesis that none of our faculties are free of error and that these errors happen at least occasionally.

> It appears, I think, from what has been said, that there is no more reason to account our senses fallacious, than our reason, our memory, or any other faculty of judging which Nature hath given us. They are all limited and imperfect; but wisely suited to the present condition of man. We are liable to error and wrong judgement in the use of them all; but as little in the informations of sense as in the deductions of reasoning. And the errors we fall into with regard to objects of sense are not corrected by reason, but by more accurate attention to the informations we may receive by our senses themselves. (EIP 251-252)

While our liability to error and wrong judgement with regard to objects of sense already makes it difficult to claim that perception is factive, the fact that the wrong judgement is one of two parts in perception (besides conception) makes it much more implausible to uphold the factivity of perception in the face of these quotations.

It is important to note Reid's way of dealing with this fallibilism. Rather than despairing or losing trust in our faculties, he points out that we successfully correct these errors by further relying on the faculties (as far as we can tell, anyway) and that all this is not sufficient to call them fallacious.[32] A fallacious faculty would be one that led us systematically astray, while a

[31] Cummins (1974: 333) saw an inconsistency between his fallibilism and his fifth principle. To understand perception as factive is among his solutions to this problem, which he discards on exegetical grounds. The other two solutions, both of which he discards, are to claim that distinct perception is factive, because the fifth principle is only about distinct perception, or to understand the principles descriptively. He discards the latter on the grounds that one would be 'foisting on Reid a position he undoubtedly would have rejected. [...] [T]hat the ordinary man's system of beliefs may be shot through with error and is, at least, partially irrational. Such a conclusion would have delighted Hume; Reid would not have knowingly accepted it' (Cummins: 339).

[32] Here, Reid appears to echo a passage in Bacon's *New Organon*: 'Furthermore, we

fallible faculty is one that is simply not perfect, i.e., it does not guarantee truth.

> 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. (EIP 76)

Whereas the fallibilism case is relatively easy to make, the case with ordinary language is rather difficult. We already know that Reid relies on ordinary language in philosophy, as well as that he thinks that reflection on language is a means to establish what beliefs are held in the population speaking the language.

There is at least one passage in which Reid claims the authority of ordinary language with regard to perception, and it features a misperception. Sadly, things are rather complicated. The passage is from chapter 22, *Of the fallacy of the senses*, of the second Essay, which enumerates and discusses a couple of cases in which a subject perceives something that is not there, or is not as it was perceived. While Reid's intention with this section is to argue that misperception is seldom the result of the senses, but rather of the judgement involved in the perception, a presupposition of his arguments is that we do perceive things faultily.[33]

> Thus when a globe is set before me, I perceive by my eyes that it has three dimensions and a spherical figure. To say that this is not perception, would be to reject the authority of custom in the use of words, which no wise man will do: But that it is not the testimony of my sense of seeing, every Philosopher knows. I see only a circular form, having the light and colour distributed in a certain way over it. But being accustomed to observe this distribution of light and colour only in a spherical body, I immediately, from what I see, believe the object to be spherical, and say that I see or perceive it to be spherical. When

have many ways of scrutinising the information of the senses themselves. For the senses often deceive, but they also give evidence of their own errors' (Bacon 2000: 17).

[33]Keep in mind that the false conclusions that we draw upon the informations of sense is the belief that features in perception. Reid's account of perception does not lend itself to the attempt to save factivity by shedding the wrong belief from perception. The belief is part of the perception, and if it is wrong, the perception doesn't cohere with the world.

> a painter, by an exact imitation of that distribution of light and colour, which I have been accustomed to see only in a real sphere, deceives me, so as to make me take that to be a real sphere, which is only a painted one, the testimony of my eye is true; the colour and visible figure of the object is truly what I see it to be: The error lies in the conclusion drawn from what I see, to wit, that the object has three dimensions and a spherical figure. The conclusion is false in this case; but whatever be the origin of this conclusion, it is not properly the testimony of sense. (EIP 247-248)

For now, focus only on the first two sentences of the quoted passage. There, Reid says that to refrain from saying that the subject in question does not perceive would be to reject the way ordinary people talk. To stick to ordinary language as far as possible is one of Reid's methodological constraints, which is why he speaks of perception in such cases. The problem is that a picky reader can resist by claiming that the passage features two situations, one with the globe present, and one with a painting present. All the interesting bits are said by Reid with regard to the first, but not the last situation. I want to say that the whole point of the passage is to show that the same thing happens mentally, and this is why Reid's judgements carry over from the first to the second situation. In both cases we see a circular form, having light and colour distributed in exactly that way which makes us believe in a spherical object and which makes us believe that we believe that we perceive a spherical object. To say that this is not perception, no wise man will do. There is no reason why he wouldn't repeat his judgements with regard to the second situation, except that the second situation lacks a globe. I understand that many will hold that the situations are therefore different, and they will cherish the fact that Reid does not explicitly repeat his judgements in the second situation. However, I can show that he would be willing to repeat them, and that he believes that the second situation features a perception just as the first. Shortly before the above passage there is a discussion with regard to ordinary language.

> The appearance of the sign immediately produces the belief of its usual attendant, and we think we perceive the one as well as the other. That such conclusions are formed even in infancy, no

> man can doubt; nor is it less certain that they are confounded with the natural and immediate perceptions of sense, and in all languages are called by the same name. We are therefore authorised by language to call them perception, and must often do so, or speak unintelligibly. But philosophy teaches us in this, as in many other instances, to distinguish things which the vulgar confound. I have therefore given the name of acquired perception to such conclusions, to distinguish them from what is naturally, originally, and immediately testified by our senses. (EIP 247)

Reid calls those perceptions acquired perceptions which result from experience, whereas a natural perception is one which requires no prior experience. The more often we perceive a conjunction of two things, they will act more as sign and thing signified. Additionally, the more often will it happen that, upon sensing the sign, we only perceive the thing signified. When the sign is present, but the thing signified is not, there will regularly be a perception of the thing signified — perception without an object. Reid, contrary to many of his interpreters, concludes by giving a different name to this kind of perception, 'acquired perception', but he still considers it to be a kind of perception.[34]

With regard to natural perception, he gives the same explanation of misperception. They happen because perceptions are connected with sensations (when they act as signs), and sensations are connected with impressions. There can be sensations without objects, and the perception will happen nonetheless. There can also be impressions without objects, and the sensation and perception will happen nonetheless. Note the presence of nature in the passage below. The difference to acquired perception is simply that natural perceptions are not learned.

> Nature has connected our perception of external objects with certain sensations. If the sensation is produced, the corresponding perception follows even when there is no object, and in that case is apt to deceive us. In like manner, Nature has connected our sensations with certain impressions that are made upon the

[34] Reid, in the subsequent passage, clarifies that while many resolve acquired perception 'into some reasoning, of which we lost the remembrance', he thinks 'it results from some part of our constitution distinct from reason' (EIP 247).

> nerves and brain: And, when the impression is made, from whatever cause, the corresponding sensation and perception immediately follows. (EIP 214)

If this doesn't convince you that his judgement with regard to the authority of language carries over from the situation with a globe to the situation without a globe, it should at least convince you that Reid's theory of perception is not factive.[35] And there is more.

When it comes to direct evidence, there are two main sources of passages in which Reid gives examples of perceptions without objects.[36] Chapter 18 and chapter 22 of the second Essay, the latter of which we have already covered. Chapter 18, *Of other objects of perception*, goes through categories of objects that we perceive other than primary and secondary qualities of bodies. The first category, certain states or conditions of our own bodies, already gives a couple of examples. Thus, Reid says that we see something yellow which is really white when someone has the jaundice. There is also a reoccurring example of phantom pain featuring a man whose leg was cut off.

> [I]n the man who feels pain in his toe after the leg is cut off, the nerve that went to the toe, part of which was cut off with the leg, had the same impression made upon the remaining part, which, in the natural state of his body, was caused by a hurt in the toe: And immediately this impression is followed by the sensation and perception which Nature connected with it. (EIP 214)

Reid generalizes from this case to say that whenever an impression which is usually connected to an object occurs, a perception of the connected objects occurs as well. In the below quote, Reid seems to fully commit to this possibility.

[35] Lehrer thinks that while acquired perceptions can be wrong, original perception is exempt from error, i.e. factive. The passage quoted here undermines this point. Surely, perceptions that are linked by nature to certain sensations are thereby original perceptions.

[36] The IHM features a fictional dialogue between Reid and a sceptic. The sceptic accuses Reid: 'By your own concession, the object which you perceive, and that act of your mind, by which you perceive it, are quite different things, the one may exist without the other; and as the object may exist without being perceived, so the perception may exist without an object.' Upon the sceptic's request that Reid ought to suspend his judgement, Reid disagrees, but only with the request, not with the description of his view, that perception is not factive (IHM 169).

> In like manner, if the same impressions, which are made at present upon my optic nerves by the objects before me, could be made in the dark, I apprehend that I should have the same sensations, and see the same objects which I now see. The impressions and sensations would in such a case be real, and the perception only fallacious. (EIP 215)

This concludes the selection of textual evidence for the claim that Reid has a non-factive account of perception. Both his general remarks on fallibilism, his decision to adhere to ordinary language and his examples of perceptions without objects should raise the bar on any attempt to still claim that perception, for Reid, is factive. But, of course, I am aware that while my disputants may have not read these passages in the order I presented them here, they must have read these passages. As such, my hope can only be that the following two arguments are enough to reach the tipping point.

3.3.3 The Lack of Moorean Arguments in Reid's Works

Whereas the last argument employed what we found in the text to make my case, the next argument is about what is missing from the text. Assume that Reid believes that perception is factive. Add to it the plausible conditional that if Reid believed that perception was factive, he would have used it for argumentative purposes. The initial conclusion will be that Reid uses the factivity of perception for argumentative purposes. As I will show below, this is not the case. Therefore, by means of a *reductio*, we can negate the first premise: It's not the case that Reid believes that perception is factive.

On the factivist reading, and under the assumption that he would have been aware of its argumentative potential, Reid has access to arguments in the style of G. E. Moore's proof of an external world, which involved merely waving his hands to the conclusion that material objects exist. I will briefly talk you through Moore's argument in order to motivate the conditional that Reid would have employed such arguments. I won't attempt to prove the non-existence of an argument in the body of Reid's writing. But as the alleged parallel between Moore and Reid is a commonplace of the literature, the burden lies with the factivist to produce a positive example of such an argument. Indeed, Greco (2002) thinks he has an example of

an argument that is reminiscent of Moore's hand-argument by Reid, and here, after talking shortly about Moore, I will argue that the argument's point differs widely from what Greco thinks it is. Rather than moving through his whole body of writing to show that no argument is based on the factivity of perception, there are places at which it is more likely that Reid would employ such arguments. These are the engagements with the proponents of the way of ideas and scepticism. I will discuss these further below, in chapter 5.2. The result will be that among the many arguments that Reid asserts, none are utilizing the factivity of perception. Together with the findings in this section, the conclusion is that Reid doesn't employ the factivity of perception for argumentative purposes. I think this raises issues of implausibility for the proponents of such an interpretation. At the very least, an interpretation according to which Reid holds that perception is not factive coheres better with the text.

If perception were factive, together with the assumption that we do perceive, an assumption shared across the board, including Reid, many of Reid's interlocutors would be obviously wrong. They could be proven wrong by any perception whatsoever. This is, indeed, similar to Moore's approach to proving the existence of the external world, and as many contemporary interpreters think, disproving scepticism.[37]

Moore's famous hand-argument proceeds from waving his hands in front of his audience to the conclusion that external objects exist. He closes with the observation that we could achieve the same in any number of ways.

> I can prove now, for instance, that two human hands exist. How? By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, 'Here is one hand', and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another'. And if, by doing this, I have proved ipso facto the existence of external things, you will all see that I can also do it now in numbers of other ways: there is no need to multiply examples. (Proof 146)

On the factivist reading of Reid, both he and Moore have at their disposal knowledge of such propositions as 'Here is a hand'. Indeed, as Lehrer (2017: 1510) points out, a difference between Moore and Reid is that Reid's position

[37] According to Moore himself, it was never an argument against the sceptic, but against the idealist. He tells us so in his *Reply* (Moore 1942: 673–4) and in a letter to Malcom (Malcolm 1977: 174).

is even better than Moore's. The reason being that Moore can't explain how he has the knowledge he claims to, and Reid, under the assumption that he takes perception to be factive, can. Additionally, Moores version is faced with the critique that it begs the question against the idealist, because the idealist agrees that there are hands, but disagrees that there are thereby material objects. Reid's version fares better, because that there are hands, which you and I perceive, together with the assumptions that perception is factive and that perception takes only external objects as objects, already entails the existence of material objects. Why, then, do we have Moorean Hand-arguments, but no Reidian Hand-arguments?

One way to stress the above point is to say that Reid, on the interpretation in question, reaches rock bottom on his fifth principle, which he can't prove, but which proves that there are hands, that idealism is wrong and that scepticism is wrong. Moore, in contrast, already reaches rock bottom with the claim that he knows that there are hands. Pressed to prove that premise, his response is that he can't. His solution is to reject that knowledge requires proofs (Proof 170).

> How am I to prove now that 'Here's one hand, and here's another'? I do not believe I can do it. In order to do it, I should need to prove for one thing, as Descartes pointed out, that I am not now dreaming. But how can I prove that I am not? I have, no doubt, conclusive reasons for asserting that I am not now dreaming; I have conclusive evidence that I am awake: but that is a very different thing from being able to prove it. I could not tell you what all my evidence is; and I should require to do this at least, in order to give you a proof. (Proof 169)

As the entailment of realism and therefore the negation of all anti-realist positions is quite obvious, it is likely that Reid would have used the factivity of perception to argue against anti-realism and scepticism. So far for motivating the conditional that if Reid thought that perception was factive, he would have used it for argumentative purposes.[38]

[38] Additionally, given that Reid uses ridicule against the alleged sceptic, there is this further parallel that Moore is also, sometimes, interpreted as ridiculing the sceptic with his argument. That Reid uses ridicule lends plausibility to the claim that he would give the argument even if he thought it to be bad intellectually, for example, because it constitutes a *petitio* (see EIP 571).

Greco (2002) argues that the study of Reid clarifies many otherwise obscure parts of Moore's proof. He quotes Reid from his discussion with Hume's arguments for the way of ideas. The context of the quotation is that Reid discusses arguments for the theory of ideas and finds all of them wanting (we rehearse them at 5.2.3). At the point at which Greco cites Reid, Reid has just quoted Hume saying the slightest philosophy corrects the universal opinion that we see external objects, because according to philosophy, the direct objects of perception are ideas, or in the terminology of Hume, 'nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception' (Enquiry 12.9). After clarifying that Reid understands Hume's thesis as claiming that all immediate objects of mental operations are ideas, he goes on to say the following (which is also the quote Greco relies on).

> If this be the meaning, (and it is the only pertinent one I can think of), there is no more in this passage but an assertion of the proposition to be proved, and an assertion that philosophy teaches it. If this be so, I beg leave to dissent from philosophy till she gives me reason for what she teaches. For though common sense and my external senses demand my assent to their dictates upon their own authority, yet philosophy is not entitled to this privilege. But that I may not dissent form so grave a personage without giving a reason, I give this as the reason of my dissent. I see the sun when he shines; I remember the battle of Culloden; and neither of these objects is an image or perception. (EIP 179)

First, Reid notes that Hume gives no argument, but simply states what is taught by philosophy and that it contradicts what non-philosophers think about mental operations and their objects. Then, he points to the fact that philosophy does not force our beliefs, but that common sense and the external senses do so. Mockingly, I think, Reid continues to give as a reason where no reason is needed, that what he sees is no idea, and that what he remembers is no idea, either.

Greco thinks that because Reid here tells us that what is seen is the sun and what is remembered is a battle, this is similar to Moore when he proclaims 'This is a hand!' I disagree, because the target is different, and because Reid does not presuppose the factivity of perception in the above passage. The discussion in the above passage is about what the object of

perception is, not whether the sun exists. When I perceive the sun, that is, when I have a conception of the sun and believe that it exists, I have this conception and belief about the sun, whether it exists or not. Reid's point is that the intentional object is not an idea, but a thing that, if it exists, exists externally. Reid's discussion is not in the field of ontology, whether the world exists, or epistemology, whether we know that it exists, but within the field of descriptive psychology, whether the objects of our mental operations are mental things, ideas, or not. Based on observation he sides with the latter option: Introspection reveals no ideas.[39]

As the only argument that was supposed to be similar to Moore's hand argument turned out to be not at all similar, together with the findings of chapter 5, I can say with some certainty that Reid does not employ the factivity of perception for argumentative purposes. This is evidence that he didn't think perception was factive.

3.3.4 The No-Grasp Objection

I call the next objection the no-grasp objection, for the following two reasons. First, I think that Reid's theory includes that we have a grasp on whether we perceive or not. This grasp is lost if we treat perception as factive. There is therefore an inconsistency with the textual evidence. Accordingly, there are two parts to the objection. First, to show that factive perception means that we have no grasp on whether we perceive or not. Secondly, to show that Reid thought we have such a grasp.

In order to show you that treating perception as factive removes our grasp from perception, note that there are two further assumptions in play that are shared by all participants. Common to the discussion about perception is the distinction between illusions and hallucinations. An illusion happens when the perceived object exists, but differs from how it is perceived (the agent sees a blue apple, but there is a red apple). A hallucination happens when the perceived object doesn't exist (the agent sees a blue apple, but there is no apple).[40] The first assumption is that illusions

[39]The argument from hallucination is generally taken to suggest that the objects of perception must be ideas. But Reid goes so far that even cases of imagination feature no ideas (except when an idea is imagined). Even if we imagine non-existent things, these non-existent things are the objects of imagination. See footnote 2 of this dissertations's chapter 2 and EIP 160, 321.

[40]As usual, things are more complicated. We can also conceive of such cases in which the

and hallucinations occur. The second assumption is that they are introspectively indistinguishable from perceptions. No amount of careful observation will reveal a difference between seeming to see, but actually failing to see, and seeing. Therefore, the difference between perceptions and hallucinations must lie somewhere else. There are broadly two strategies to close this explanatory gap. Externalism locates the difference solely in the world: the externalist speaks only of perception when both the correct mental state and cohering world state are present. Disjunctivism claims that the mental states involved in perception differ from those involved in hallucinations: there is a distinguished mental state that only occurs in perception, but only if the world state is adequate. Otherwise, we have a different mental state. To complete the triplet, Reid, on my view, thinks that there is one 'state' that, whatever the world state is, is perception. If we think we perceive, we perceive. This is the sense in which we do have a grasp on perception that is absent in the other candidates.[41] On externalism or disjunctivism, thinking that I perceive is consistent with me not perceiving.

So how exactly do they work? Externalism distinguishes tokens of the same mental state with regard to their relation to the external world. If the state represents the world, and the world accords with that representation, that is a perception. If the world does not accord with that representation, it is merely a seeming perception – it feels the same as a perception, indeed it is indistinguishable from a perception introspectively, but it is not a perception. Mind you, it is introspectively indistinguishable because it is the same mental state. It is just that the world is not playing along. Accordingly, perception being factive entails that we have no way to determine that we have ever had a real perception.

Disjunctivists reject what they call the *common kind claim*, which is the claim that veridical, illusory and hallucinatory perception share a common mental kind.[42] Instead, disjunctivists think that veridical perception involves a different mental state (or event) than hallucination.[43] As a result,

agent hallucinates a blue apple, but there is also a blue apple in front of the agent, visible, in normal conditions, etc. Additionally, illusions are sometimes treated like perceptions, sometimes like hallucinations. For these reasons, I will focus on hallucinations in what follows.

[41]The object of perception has always this property that it is supposed to exist externally. It may fail to do so, of course. Ideas, however, are mental objects that don't exist externally, and this is why they can't be the objects of perception according to Reid.

[42]The following is loosely based on Soteriou (2020).

[43]There is no agreement about whether illusions should be treated along the lines of

whenever it appears to us that we perceive, we correctly report this by a disjunction: Either we veridically perceive, or we have a hallucinatory experience. To give you an example, one way to be a disjunctivist is to adopt direct realism, the thesis that the direct objects of perception are external objects and not representations of external objects. Even more illustrating would be that version of direct realism according to which the external objects make up, or are a part of, your perceptual experience. Of course, on such a picture, perceptions differ from hallucinations. The former involve parts that the latter lack. Although the mental states are different, even the direct realist disjunctivist agrees that, no matter how big the difference is hypothesized, we have no grasp on whether the one or the other state obtains.

Therefore, whether we adopt externalism or disjunctivism, as long as perception is considered to be factive, we will not be able to introspectively determine whether we perceive or not. This is not consistent with the text, as I will show now.[44]

When it comes to the textual evidence, disjunctivism is worse off than externalism. Disjunctivism posits a duality of types of perceptual mental states that are by hypothesis introspectively indistinguishable. As such, disjunctivism is faced with Reid's disdain for hypotheses in addition to the inconsistency with regard to his claim that we have a grasp on perception. The main source of this disagreeing evidence is the parallel between disjunctivism and the way of ideas. Both posit some mental entity for which we have no observational, i.e. introspective, evidence. Additionally, Reid's rejection of the way of ideas invokes Newton's first rule of philosophy.

> No more causes, nor any other causes of natural effects ought to be admitted, but such as are both true, and are sufficient for explaining their appearances. (EIP 51)

According to Reid, neither have we any evidence of ideas, nor would they explain the appearance of natural effects.[45] As to the two states of the

veridical perception or hallucinations.

[44] Additionally, the material I produced at the beginning of this chapter speaks against this, as well. We don't know perception by the testimony of consciousness alone, if it is an open question whether we hallucinate or perceive, and if that question can be settled only by pointing to the presence of the objects in question. That pointing will presumably involve the testimony of sense, which is explicitly absent from Reid's inquiry into perception.

[45] His argument against the way of ideas will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

disjunctivist, we have no evidence of them,[46] and if Reid's theory is correct, they are more causes than need be to explain perception. Indeed, one might wonder whether to explain one phenomenon — the feeling of perceiving the world — by two different states depending on whether the world accords or not (to which we have no immediate access besides the very perception in question) is something Reid would accept as an explanation at all.[47] Whether the posited mental state exists we don't know, given that we can't distinguish it from what the disjunctivist would call a hallucinatory perceptual state. But if we were to investigate whether the two types of mental state would be sufficient to explain the appearance of natural effects, it raises the question what appearance of a natural effect the disjunctivist aims to explain.

In fact, this is not at all what disjunctivism is about. Disjunctivism posits its two types of mental states in order to make room for a theory of perception that is not representational. It finds the common kind claim to be an unmotivated assumption that is simply inherited and which, according to the disjunctivist, stands in the way of a direct theory of perception. Reid, of course, does defend a theory of perception that is not representational, but this line of his works is part of his attempt to explain the appearance of natural effects, in this case the feeling of perceiving the world.

Another problem for both externalism and disjunctivism is the fact that Reid thinks that we do have a grasp on whether we perceive or not. First there is direct evidence that Reid thought we would know introspectively that we perceived, some of which we have already portrayed above. And it makes sense that we can, if Reid is right about perception being an immediate belief and conception. We have an introspective grasp on both conception and belief. If perception is nothing over and above these, then we will be able to determine whether we perceive or not just by introspection. At many times, Reid simply seems to assume that we can do this: '[...]

[46] It must be noted that Reid thinks the only proper evidence is empirical. On Copenhaver's rendition of Reid's reading of Newton's law, she says: 'posit no merely theoretical causes -– only observable causes' (Copenhaver 2006: 459). But minds are causes, and minds are unobservable, so Reid would violate Copenhaver's rendition of Newton's law by employing minds in the explanans – which he does.

[47] Indeed, it is unclear whether they try to explain the same thing. The disjunctivist presupposes certain theoretical requirements on any notion of perception, while Reid takes perception as a mental operation and proceeds from what he introspectively finds. He is theoretically neutral in a sense that most theories of perception are not.

we must acknowledge, that, though we are conscious of perceiving objects, we are altogether ignorant how it is brought about' (EIP 178).

Indeed, Reid thinks we are conscious of all mental operations (as far as we can tell), and especially so of perception. And although he would allow that there might be operations of which we are not conscious of, it would be misleading to give it the same name of something that we are conscious of.

> As far as we can discover, every operation of our mind is attended with consciousness, and particularly that which we call the perception of external objects; and to speak of a perception of which we are not conscious, is to speak without any meaning. As consciousness is the only power by which we discern the operations of our own minds, or can form any notion of them, an operation of mind of which we are not conscious, is, we know not what; and to call such an operation by the name of perception, is an abuse of language. No man can perceive an object, without being conscious that he perceives it. [...] And if we will suppose operations of mind, of which we are not conscious, and give a name to such creatures of our imagination, that name must signify what we know nothing about. (EIP 190-191)

The above quote is no outlier. Reid repeats this throughout his work, and oftentimes appears more radical than in the quote above.[48]

> We have an immediate conception of the operations of our own minds, joined with a belief of their existence; and this we call consciousness. But this is only giving a name to this source of our knowledge. It is not a discovery of its cause. (EIP 227)

There is still some room for the externalist or disjunctivist, because consciousness does not imply that we form distinct notions, it being restricted to the present thoughts and operations (EIP 24).

> [Consciousness] gives the like immediate knowledge of things in the mind, that is, of our own thoughts and feelings, as the senses give us of things external. There is this difference, however, that

[48] See also EIP 24, 42, 269, 420, 472. This part on consciousness and reflection relies in part on Yaffe (2004), who collected the relevant passages and showed that consciousness falls short of attention.

> an external object may be at rest, and the sense may be employed about it for some time. But the objects of consciousness are never at rest; the stream of thought flows like a river, without stopping a moment; the whole train of thought passes in succession under the eye of consciousness, which is always employed about the present. But is it consciousness that analyses complex operations, distinguishes their different ingredients, and combines them in distinct parcels under general names? This surely is not the work of consciousness, nor can it be performed without reflection, recollecting and judging of what we are conscious of, and distinctly remember. (EIP 420-421)

It is by the power of reflection that we form distinct notions about our thoughts and operations. One main feature that allows this is that reflection is not limited to the present, as opposed to consciousness.

> [R]eflection is not one power of the mind; it comprehends many; such as recollection, attention, distinguishing, comparing, judging. By these powers our minds are furnished not only with many simple and original notions, but all our notions, which are accurate and well defined, and which alone are the proper materials of reasoning. (EIP 269)

The result of this brief excursion into Reid's theory of consciousness is meant to motivate that Reid's theory involves that we have a grasp on perception. Given that this grasp is lost if there are, for any operation we would take to be a perception, in reality always two indistinguishable states, one perceptual (and veridical) and one hallucinatory, to ascribe to Reid an account of perception as factive is not promising. Likewise, this grasp would be lost if there were only one state, constituting a perception only when the perceived objects are really there, as the externalist would have it.

The textual evidence, the lack of Moorean arguments, and the fact that to ascribe to Reid a theory of factive perception would contradict his view that, whenever we perceive, we are conscious of it, taken together, suggest that Reid's account of perception is non-factive. We can perceive things that don't exist and that we perceive that p doesn't entail that p. This raises the question of the truth of the fifth principle, which *prima facie* states exactly the opposite, that whenever we distinctly perceive, the perceived objects

exist, and exist like we perceive them to be. After establishing, in the next section, that Reid's notion of evidence is not normative, this point is taken up again.

3.4 Evidence

The next thesis to be defended is that Reid's notion of evidence is not normative, but rather psychological and descriptive. This serves two dialectical purposes. Firstly, it pre-empts a potential challenge against my thesis that Reid's account of common sense and its principles is solely descriptive. That is, because if Reid employs normative notions elsewhere in his philosophy of mind, it would seem likely to understand other notions normatively as well. But if none of his notions are understood normatively, it is much harder to argue that common sense is normative. Secondly, Reid claims that the first principles are self-evident. If Reid's notion of evidence were normative, it would be natural to think that self-evidence is a normative notion as well, paving the way towards an interpretation of Reid as a full-fledged epistemologist.

The biggest obstacle in seeing that Reid's notion of evidence is not normative is that our contemporary notion of evidence seems to be normative through and through, as is recorded by the following passage from Jaegwon Kim.

> In any event, the concept of evidence is inseparable from that of justification. When we talk of 'evidence' in an epistemological sense we are talking about justification: one thing is 'evidence' for another just in case the first tends to enhance the reasonableness or justification of the second. [...] A strictly nonnormative concept of evidence is not our concept of evidence; it is something that we do not understand. (Kim 1988: 390)

Kim's last remark overshoots the mark, for surely we can *understand* the following exchange.

> A: You brought your umbrella, but there is not one cloud to be seen, and it has been like this the whole week. What was your evidence for thinking it might rain today?
> B: I consulted the tea-leaves, as I always do before I leave the

> house.
> A: That was your evidence? How the tea-leaves lie in your cup? But that is bad evidence to decide whether it will rain or not. There is no connection between the tea-leaves and the weather, you know. Didn't you notice that it isn't working?
> B: But this is the first time they weren't right. I'm no fool, you know. I wouldn't trust a method that isn't working half the time.

In A's first utterance, the question for evidence asks of B the actual reasons for his belief that it might rain today. There is nothing normative about an actual reason for an actual belief. As the second utterance of A shows, this purely descriptive notion of evidence can be normatively evaluated, as we do with many descriptive notions. We might prefer another, normative notion of evidence, one according to which something is evidence for a belief only if it makes the belief more reasonable. But the fact that we understand, in A's second utterance, that the way the tea-leaves are lying is bad evidence for any beliefs about the weather, shows that there are other notions of evidence available. As I will show below, Reid's notion of evidence is exactly such a descriptive notion. Afterwards, I will critically engage with Rysiew (2005), who claims that the textual evidence favours a notion of evidence that is both psychological and normative.

3.4.1 The Descriptive Account of Evidence

Although the above statement by Kim records a sentiment that is certainly present in contemporary philosophy, it isn't just as bad as Kim suggests. Reid's interpreters do seem to understand what a nonnormative concept of evidence would be. For example, here is Alston claiming that Reid's notion of evidence is psychological (and not normative).

> We have already seen that Reid gives a psychological account of evidence as 'whatever is a ground of belief'. A proposition is self-evident, then, when it contains within itself the ground of its acceptance, or, to speak more plainly, when 'the judgement follows the apprehension [...] necessarily.' [EIP 452] Thus to say that I. [i.e., perceptual beliefs about the immediate environment are generally true, which is Alston's bold rendition of Reid's

> fifth principle], or any other principle is self-evident in this sense is just to say that we are so constituted that considering the principle will lead us to believe it. (Alston 1985: 441)

Rysiew (2005), whose arguments we will discuss below, also rejects the non-normative notion not on grounds of its incomprehensibility, but because he thinks his hybrid notion of evidence as evidentness best explains the textual evidence.

Reid gives us no theory of evidence, and his aversion to hypotheses and speculation is especially pertinent here. However, some features of Reid's notion of evidence can be extracted: (i) it is merely descriptive; (ii) it is subjective; (iii) it is about reasons, not causes; (iv) there are many kinds of evidence; (v) and in many cases, we know that something is evident, but not what the evidence is.

We'll structure our discussion around the passage below. At the very end of this subsection, you'll find more passages that suggest a merely descriptive understanding of evidence.

> That men often believe what there is no just ground to believe, and thereby are led into hurtful errors, is too evident to be denied: And, on the other hand, that there are just grounds of belief, can as little be doubted by any man who is not a perfect sceptic.
>
> We give the name of evidence to whatever is a ground of belief. To believe without evidence is a weakness which every man is concerned to avoid, and which every man wishes to avoid. Nor is it in a man's power to believe any thing longer than he thinks he has evidence. (EIP 228)

The notion of evidence that makes this passage the most coherent is one according to which the evidence-relation holds between actual reasons and actual beliefs. All beliefs that have grounds have evidence. Some of them have just, or good, evidence, and some, as the candidates in the former paragraph, believe upon bad evidence. By saying that something is evidence for something else, we don't thereby make a claim as to what should be believed upon what grounds, we make a claim about what is believed upon what grounds. As to the fact that there are evidence-less beliefs, this is

implied by it being a weakness 'every man wishes to avoid', and by Reid's commitment, later in the EAP,[49] to evidence-less beliefs.[50]

> When we consider man as a rational creature, it may seem right that he should have no belief but what is grounded upon 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 evidence, or, at least, what to our judgement 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 evidence at all. (EAP 85)

If there are beliefs without evidence, and given the assumption that there are no uncaused beliefs, we must understand Reid's notion of evidence as one between reasons and beliefs, not causes and beliefs. The cause, or at least part of it, of any belief whatsoever will be the faculty of judgement. Given reasons as inputs, the faculty of judgement then outputs beliefs. The former are the evidence of the latter. With regard to natural beliefs, the same output will be given to the same input across mankind – this is just Reid's idea of common sense – but with regard to acquired beliefs, people will have different mechanisms of belief formation. That means that we have to relativize the notion of evidence to subjects. Another reason is that we are dealing here with actual reasons and beliefs, and these require subjects who have them. Therefore, some reason is evidence for some belief never

[49] Two further passages from the same context are worth citing here. 1: '[...] but that there is something in man which we call belief, which is not grounded on evidence, I think, must be granted' (EAP 86), and 2: 'His belief, therefore, is not grounded on evidence. It is the result of his constitution' (EAP 88).

[50] In his article on evidence, Rysiew (2005: 111) asks 'But how could it be a *weakness* to believe without evidence – indeed, how is it even *possible* to believe without evidence – if evidence is simply what prompts belief?' The answer lies in acknowledging the fact that evidence prompts belief, but not all beliefs are prompted by evidence: there are evidence-less beliefs. But more importantly, Rysiew, on other occasions, interprets Reid as saying not only that we must, but that we ought to believe in the first principles. To which I answer that it is Reid's contention that if we must believe something, there is no place for the 'ought'. But here things are backwards. Rysiew thinks that it can only be weakness to believe without grounds if it is possible to believe without grounds, which is contrary to his usual position and an expression of mine.

tout court, but merely for some subject.

As to the former passage, that to believe without evidence is taken as weakness can be explained by the fact that Reid assumes that we have an innate want of evidence (EAP 87). The last sentence, however, if taken literally, contradicts Reid's commitment to evidence-less beliefs. If we read it as limited to adults in possession of reason, it could still be true, because Reid's examples of evidence-less beliefs are taken from children and animals.

So far, evidence is a descriptive and subjective notion that links together actual reasons and actual beliefs. Another feature pertains to the nature of reasons. Reid finds there to be many kinds of evidence that share nothing but the fact 'that they are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind, some of them in the highest degree, which we call certainty, others in various degrees according to circumstances' (EIP 229). Thus, there is nothing definite we can say as to the nature of reasons except that they may come in various shapes and forms. Reid, then, is a pluralist about evidence.

Yet another discernible feature is Reid's agnosticism about the evidence of many beliefs. The result is that he often focusses upon the evidentness of beliefs, rather than on the evidence of beliefs. It is also grounded in Reid's stance against speculation. He finds there to be beliefs that are evident, and he is unable to discern what the evidence is. Given his limited methods of observation and experiment, there is nothing more he can do.

However, there are two kinds of evidence that are accessible. Of the different kinds of evidence known to Reid, he explains that the 'evidence of reasoning, and that of some self-evident truths, seems to be the least mysterious, and the most perfectly comprehended' (EIP 233) by giving an example of stating what the evidence in each case is. With regard to the self-evident and necessary truth, its evidence is that we see the subject being included in the predicate, while the evidence, when it comes to reasoning, consists in seeing that a believed consequence is entailed by self-evident propositions (EIP 233). Of course, we don't literally *see* it. Reid, here, is still ambiguous. We can understand his examples either as saying that some belief's evidence is that we *see* something, i.e., because they are the product of some mental operation or process. Or we focus upon what is seen, the relationship between subject and predicate, or the entailments between propositions. Because Reid's 'seeing' could either mean the operation or the belief resultant from that operation, even this 'least mysterious' kind of

evidence remains not at all clear.[51]

With regard to perceptual and memorial beliefs, Reid holds fast that they are evident despite the darkness surrounding their production. Furthermore, he finds these beliefs to be immediate, meaning that no reasoning is involved. When Reid asks himself whether the evidence of sense is the same as the evidence of axioms or self-evident truths, he initially gives two reasons why this is not the case. These reasons are that his contemporaries have attempted to prove and disprove that there are external objects, meaning that for them, it couldn't have been self-evident. Additionally, the word 'axiom' is most often used in contexts in which the proposition is necessary and its truth not dependent upon time and place. However, reasons Reid, '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. For my senses give me as immediate conviction of what they testify, as my understanding gives of what is commonly called an axiom' (EIP 231). Thus, Reid calls the perceptual belief that there is a tree over there self-evident, but that there is a tree over there is not the reason why I believe that there is a tree over there. So Reid understands self-evidence in these cases not as reflexive evidence, as would be the case if S believes p because p, or because S understands p. Rather, he cites the way in which the beliefs are brought about as reason for their self-evidence, namely as immediate and certain as in the case of axioms. Reid assumes that this isn't the full story, but that this is the best that can be done. The only thing we can observe is that we have these immediate beliefs, of which we are certain in the highest degree possible, just as it is with axioms. The question as to how this happens (which would be one source of closure with regard to the question whether we can trust them) remains, according to Reid, unanswerable.

In the beginning of the chapter, Reid mentions the 'impenetrable darkness', which hides how our conceptions of external objects, and the belief of their existence, is produced (EIP 226).[52] The ending of the chapter resumes

[51] If we stress Reid's remark that it is 'the most perfectly comprehended', it could be argued that this favours the understanding that evidence has to do with the relationships between propositions or their parts, rather than the mental operation that processes this. The former is presumably far better comprehended than the latter.

[52] There is also, right after the beginning, his remark that 'We know, that when certain impressions are made upon our organs, nerves, and brain, certain corresponding sensations are felt, and certain objects are both conceived and believed to exist. But in this train

this theme. Following the paragraph stating that the evidence of reasoning consists in seeing that a consequent is entailed by a self-evident proposition, Reid goes on:

> On the other hand, when I remember distinctly a past event, or see an object before my eyes, this commands my belief no less than an axiom. But when, as a Philosopher, I reflect upon this belief, and want to trace it to its origin, I am not able to resolve it into necessary and self-evident axioms, or conclusions that are necessarily consequent upon them. I seem to want that evidence which I can best comprehend, and which gives perfect satisfaction to an inquisitive mind; yet it is ridiculous to doubt, and I find it is not in my power. An attempt to throw off this belief, is like the attempt to fly, equally ridiculous and impracticable.
>
> To a philosopher, who has been accustomed to think that the treasure of his knowledge is the acquisition of that reasoning power of which he boasts, it is no doubt humiliating to find, that his reason can lay no claim to the greater power of it.
>
> By his reason, he 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 know not how he came by it. It is no wonder that the pride of philosophy should lead some to invent vain theories, in order to account for this knowledge; and others, who see this to be impracticable, to spurn at a knowledge they cannot account for, and vainly attempt to throw it off, as a reproach to their understanding. But the wise and humble will receive it as the gift of Heaven, and endeavour to make the best use of it. (EIP 233)

In conclusion, Reid's notion of evidence is descriptive, subjective and pluralist. On top of that, for a large class of beliefs, Reid holds that they are evident, but is agnostic about what their evidence consists in.

Additionally, the last paragraph of the quotation limits the space of interpretation considerably. Any interpretation of Reid according to which

of operations Nature works in the dark. We can neither discover the cause of any one of them, nor any necessary connection of one with another [...]' (EIP 227).

Reid can account, or even attempts to account, for our knowledge of what exists and what has existed ascribes ideas to him which he himself rejects.

Whatever the things are that are evidence for our beliefs, they could make our beliefs rational, reasonable, justified, warranted etc. as it is according to our contemporary conception. In that case, evidence would be a normative notion. For Reid, to the contrary, evidence rather brings about belief, governs it, commands it, produces it. All these terms suggest that evidence is not normative.

If we take a look at the other passages clearly favouring a nonnormative notion, this further encourages a solely psychological understanding of evidence.

> [...] such is the constitution of the human mind, that evidence discerned by us, forces a corresponding degree of assent. (EIP 481)
>
> Every degree of evidence perceived by the mind, produces a proportioned degree of assent or belief. (EIP 557)
>
> What this evidence is, is more easily felt than described. Those who never reflected upon its nature, feel its influence in governing their belief. (EIP 229)
>
> [The different kinds of evidence] seem to me to agree only in this, that they are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind, some of them in the highest degree, which we call certainty, others in various degrees according to circumstances. (EIP 229)

It would be unfair, however, to ignore those passages that involve normativity, and therefore, we'll now pass over to the next section in order to engage with Rysiew. Rysiew argues that Reid's notion of evidence is both psychological and normative. It is true that such an account would be necessary, if there really were passages in which Reid endorsed a normative notion of evidence. Indeed, I think that whenever Reid invokes normativity, it is by means of modifying the term 'evidence', as in 'just evidence' or 'just grounds'. Alternatively, the modification can also occur on the side of the subject, as when we say that just evidence is what compels sound minds. However, this is consistent with holding that the notion of evidence is non-

normative. There is evidence, and then there is good evidence. All evidence produces belief, but good evidence, naturally, produces good beliefs.

3.4.2 Rysiew's Reidian Evidence: The Possibility of Monsters

The first argument that can be extracted from Rysiew's article is based on the idea that Reid is committed to the logical possibility of 'monsters' and is taken to show that Reid simply can't have a merely descriptive or psychological notion of evidence. In Reid's own words, someone 'would be a greater monster than a man born without hands or feet' who 'perfectly understood a just syllogism, without believing that the conclusion follows from the premises' (EIP 481). The argument runs like this. If Reid were to define evidence simply as what compels assent, then monsters would be impossible. But Reid holds that such monsters are logically possible. Therefore, it is not the case that Reid defines evidence simply as what compels assent.

If Reid were to restrict his definition in some way, Rysiew argues that any such restriction would have to involve normative notions, and therefore can't be of help at defending a purely psychological notion. If, for example, we restrict the definition to normal human beings, Rysiew thinks that we have to explicate 'normal' normatively.

Let's move through the arguments step by step. First, Rysiew (himself citing Van Cleve (1999)) takes Reid to be in the business of defining evidence. The definition that evidence is simply what compels assent couldn't be the one endorsed by Reid, though, because he is committed to the logical possibility of monsters.

> But if such a monster is a logical possibility, it *can't* be that evidence is simply what compels assent (Van Cleve 1999: 18). And if 'evidence' is 'whatever is the ground of belief,' it can't be that *ground* is a purely psychological notion. (Rysiew 2005: 111)

That Rysiew and Van Cleve take the logical possibility of a monster to be an argument against interpreting Reid as holding a psychological notion of evidence only, is further evidence that they take Reid to offer a definition of

evidence. In his monograph on Reid, Van Cleve repeats the argument twice, to the following effect.

> Since monsters are not logical impossibilities (chimeras are not round squares), Reid is implying that it is contingent that our assent follows upon evidence. It would *not* be contingent if the evident were *defined* as what compels assent. (Van Cleve 2015: 324)

> [I]f evidence were *defined* as what compels assent, a man who refused to accept an evident syllogism would not be a 'monster,' as Reid says, but an impossibility. (Van Cleve 2015: 336)

However, the textual evidence for the thesis that Reid defines evidence *at all*, is simply absent. At no other point is Reid in the business of defining (in the sense that logical possibilities would threaten these definitions) important notions. Indeed, with respect to most of them, including belief and perception, he claims that no such definition can be given.

> There is no subject in which there is more frequent occasion to use words that cannot be logically defined, than in treating of the powers and operations of the mind. The simplest operations of our minds must all be expressed by words of this kind. No man can explain by a logical definition what it is to think, to apprehend, to believe, to will, to desire. Every man who understands the language has some notion of the meaning of those words; and every man, who is capable of reflection, may, by attending to the operations of his own mind, which are signified by them, form a clear and distinct notion of them; by they cannot be logically defined. (EIP 19-20)

Until the argument is made that evidence is different from the rest, we can safely regard Reid to offer us records of his observations and experiments, but not definitions. That Reid defines evidence is especially questionable, when we see that he thinks that our access to evidence is partly mediated by the feeling we have of its power to govern our beliefs.

> What this evidence is, is more easily felt than described. Those who never reflected upon its nature, feel its influence in governing their belief. (EIP 229)

In conclusion, we shouldn't take Reid to offer us a definition of evidence, or anything that is threatened by what is logically possible. However, if Reid *isn't* giving a definition, the logical possibility of monster becomes harmless.

The second step in Rysiew's argument concerns the logical possibility of the monster. In order to properly assess this claim, we first need to take a look at where Rysiew and Van Cleve extract this from. Whereas most of the material they cite stems from chapter 20, *Of the Evidence of Sense, and of Belief in general*, of the second Essay, *Powers by Means of our External Senses*, the monster quote comes from Reid's exposition to the seventh of the first principles, located at the fifth chapter of the sixth Essay.

> How then come we to be assured of this fundamental truth on which all others rest? Perhaps evidence, as in many other respects it resembles light, which is the discoverer of all visible objects, discovers itself at the same time; so evidence, which is the voucher for all truth, vouches for itself at the same time.
>
> This, however is certain, that such is the constitution of 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 greater monster than a man born without hands or feet. (EIP 481)

First of all, the passage comes from a discussion of a different topic located at a different place. I have also quoted the preceding paragraph, because it makes clear that, whereas the former paragraph speculates about the analogy between light and evidence, the latter comes back to the realm of certainty, and proclaims, again favouring a descriptive notion, that evidence is what forces assent. Applied to the discussion of the seventh of the first principles, Reid is saying that everyone who doesn't agree with him that our faculties are not fallacious (which is what the seventh principle states), would be like the monster, worse than a cripple. For me, this doesn't sound like Reid is after the establishment of some logical possibilities needed to fully comprehend his definition of evidence, the discussion of which happens some 200 pages earlier. It is an insult, a rhetorical figure, and nothing we should base our interpretation of what his notion of evidence is on.[53]

[53]Furthermore, we could argue that arguing from the logical possibility of a monster

Even if I'm wrong, though, as long as we take Reid to refrain from giving definitions, he can commit himself to the logical possibility of monsters as much as he likes. This opens the possibility that he thinks that 'monsters' are not only logically possible, but would be like medical curiosa (think of the man with two faces or the bearded woman).[54] These don't show that we've been all wrong in biology. As long as observation and experimentation are our sole guides to nature, we can't make claims of logical necessity.[55] Given Reid's remarks about his methodology, the same is true for his discipline and every other discipline that is based firmly on observation. We don't observe modalities (yet another parallel to Hume).[56]

Lastly, what is so monstrous about the monster? Rysiew and Van Cleve take it to be an instance that the definition of evidence forbids. Evidence produces belief, but the monster doesn't believe. Thus, a presupposition of their view is that understanding the syllogism to be just is evidence

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to what our notion of evidence should be is a violation of Newton's fourth rule: '*In experimental philosophy, propositions gathered from phenomena by induction should be considered either exactly or very nearly true notwithstanding any contrary hypotheses, until yet other phenomena make such propositions either more exact or liable to exceptions.* This rule should be followed so that arguments based on induction may not be nullified by hypotheses' (Principia, 796). The hypothesis that possibly, there could be someone like the monster, should not be a reason against our very real finding that evidence is what compels assent. One could argue that formulating a definition is not covered by the law, i.e., as not being a part of experimental philosophy. My response is that we should read Reid as exercising activities that are covered by Newton's laws, i.e., interpret him as doing experimental philosophy as far as we can, because he tells us that this is his project: to inquire into the mind by following Newton's rules, in the hopes of achieving comparable results in the science of man. Reid, then, is not formulating definitions, he is generalizing observations. See the next footnote to see that Reid adopts the same reasoning even regarding actual counterexamples to 'general rules'.

[54]In fact, this is the received meaning of 'monstra' in scholastic philosophy (see, for example, Manzo (2019)). With regard to the man born without hand or feet, Reid reports at EIP 98 that he has 'seen a man, and a very ingenious one, who was born without either hand or feet'. Nevertheless, he claims that 'it is natural to man, and common to the species, to have two hands and two feet' (ibid.).
Reid doesn't take such actual cases to be threatening: 'General rules that regard those whose intellects are sound, are not overthrown by instances of men whose intellects are hurt by any constitutional or accidental disorder' (EIP 99). That is, not even as an actual case would the monster threaten his account of evidence.

[55]Which is the reason why we were able to discover that there are black swans. If we took our observations to show that it is logically necessary that all swans are white, we couldn't have found black swans. Even if we were to claim that it is about semantic conventions rather than nature, the fact that we were ready to give up on our definition of swans as white shows that there is a flexibility at work that is not represented by rigid, logical definitions.

[56]Thus, at EIP 508, Reid says that 'Experience informs us only of what has been, but never of what must be.'.

for the monster, no matter his beliefs. That is, they understand evidence objectively, in the sense that if p is evidence for q, it is always and for everyone a reason to believe q. But a nonnormative notion of evidence makes much more sense if evidence is subjective, in the sense that it can be true that for some subject, p is evidence for q, and for some other subject p is evidence for $\neg q$. Although possible, the more plausible case will be that it is simply not the case that, for the monster, p is evidence for q.

If we take the definition seriously, we can hold fixed that evidence is what compels assent, and claim that the monster is a monster because it deviates in what it takes as evidence. If the monster has no evidence, it can't falsify the definition. How would we attempt to determine the evidence some subject has? By seeing what beliefs it forms and how they change upon changing what we think the evidence is. The monster, by hypothesis, forms no belief, even when it understands the syllogism to be just. Accordingly, understanding the syllogism to be just can't be evidence for the monster. And so the monster, on this view, doesn't falsify Reid's view that evidence produces belief. It still is a monster because it deviates pretty far from the average in what produces beliefs and what doesn't.

The monster falsifies Reid's view only if Reid understands evidence to be an objective notion. It hasn't been shown by either Van Cleve or Rysiew that Reid's notion of evidence is objective in this regard, and the text does not lend itself to such an interpretation easily.

To sum up, the argument requires that Reid defines evidence, but it is implausible that Reid does so. It is likewise implausible that he is concerned about logical possibilities. But even as a real case, the monster threatens his account only if Reid's notion of evidence were objective. Again, this is a feature that is implausible, and for which no textual evidence is available.

3.4.3 Rysiew's Reidian Evidence: Normative Normalcy?

In Rysiew's mind, that 'normal' is a normative notion is connected to the monster-argument in that any plausible restriction of the definition to circumvent the monster would involve normativity. He makes the general point in a footnote which I'll quote in full here.

> But won't such a restriction be needed even if we adopt a purely psychological notion of evidence? Surely the proponent of such

> a view needn't say that evidence is what causes beliefs in *all* humans, including those with various mental impairments. [...] 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 what *should* cause belief. Putting it another way, if the proponent of such a view says that evidence is what causes beliefs in normal persons, he will need some purely descriptive cashing-out of 'normal' itself, and it is not clear that a purely statistical notion of normalcy, say, would suffice, since many of our actual belief-formings are influenced by one or another kind of 'prejudice' [e.g. EIP 241ff.] and '[w]e are liable to error in the use of [all our faculties]' [EIP 252]. (Rysiew 2005: 119-120)

Let's unpack this. Rysiew begins by stating the thesis that I want to defend. I want Reid to say that evidence yields beliefs, while remaining open to the possibility that some people have rare defects that either could undermine this source of belief-formation (if evidence is objective), or for whom what is evidence is vastly different from ourselves (if evidence is subjective). Next, Rysiew challenges this idea by claiming that it is difficult to say what is normal and what diverges enough to count as a mental impairment without saying what we should believe, i.e., without saying something normative. He considers a statistical notion of normalcy, but thinks that it wouldn't suffice on the ground that 'many of our actual belief-formings' are influenced by one or another kind of 'prejudice' and that we are generally fallible.

It isn't obvious what the problem is. We could take into account that Reid restricts his notion of evidence to what produces beliefs in healthy, normal, human minds and add that these are occasionally influenced by prejudices and are generally fallible. As noted above, this would still exclude the monster, and there are occasions in which we would want to do that (courts of law, or when trying to determine whether someone is lying). If Rysiew thought that evidence is the *only* thing that produces beliefs in healthy, normal, human minds, this would render the prejudices that influence our belief-forming evidence. But that is still no problem as long as we understand evidence to be a purely psychological notion. Only if we take evidence to be something in consequence of which we should believe, or if

we take a normal human being to be the ideal to which everyone should conform, do we have a problem here. The descriptive account is precisely against both of these suggestions, so it is confusing if that is Rysiew's criticism.

It is also of no help to fill in the details to which Rysiew alludes. The prejudice that he mentions refers back to the chapter on the fallacy of senses. There, Reid discusses whether the belief that the earth is flat is a fallacy of the senses. He concludes that it is not, because the senses, due to being too close to the surface of the earth, don't report either that it is round or flat. He discards the example to continue the thread of his discussion, but calls the belief a prejudice believed by many. Reid, however, can say that it is normal that many believe this and it is equally normal that upon being shown contrary evidence, we change our beliefs to the belief that the earth is round. That at one point many normal human beings believe some proposition doesn't entail that we should later stick to that belief. Again, this is only true if we believe that we should believe what is normal.

Besides this general point, Rysiew is also able to cite a passage in which Reid restricts evidence to what beliefs it produces in a healthy human mind.

> [...] in most cases, we measure the degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding, when comprehended clearly and without prejudice. (EIP 557)

In a move that exemplifies a major problem of contemporary Reid-scholarship, Rysiew takes the above occurrence of 'sound understanding' as a ground to reinterpret passages without reference to sound or normal minds as being implicitly restricted to sound or normal minds. Thus, in the otherwise non-normative passage stating that the different kinds of evidence 'are all fitted by nature to produce belief in the human mind' (EIP 229), Rysiew (2005: 113) adds that what Reid meant was that they are fitted by nature to produce belief in the sound, healthy, human mind. There might be occasions on which it is legitimate to ignore certain passages as failures on part of the author, for example, if it is an exception from a rule otherwise followed (as I myself have done with regard to Reid's mishap of saying that some perceptions are only seeming, see 3.2). Here, we have two passages, one including 'sound mind', one without. And yet because there is one passage in which 'sound' occurs, Rysiew reinterprets the other passage to also be

about sound, healthy minds.

It is also worthwhile to read the above quote in its context.

> I think, in most cases, we measure the degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding, when comprehended clearly and without prejudice. Every degree of evidence perceived by the mind, produces a proportioned degree of assent or belief. The judgement may be in perfect suspense between two contradictory opinions, when there is no evidence, or equal evidence for both. The least preponderancy on one side inclines the judgement in proportion. Belief is mixed with doubt, more or less, until we come to the highest degree of evidence, when all doubt vanishes, and the belief is firm and immovable. This degree of evidence, the highest the human faculties can attain, we call certainty. (EIP 557)

Excepting the first sentence, everything speaks in favour of a purely psychological understanding of evidence on Reid's part. With regard to the first sentence, I think we should take into account that Reid employs 'we' and that the content is about measuring the degrees of evidence of someone else, both indicating that he is concerned with a practical problem. First, you might say: 'Some paragraphs above you told me that Reid would measure evidence by the effect it produces. But here, he clearly limits it to the effect it produces in sound minds. This shows that Reid is interested in an objective notion and that the monster does threaten the psychological reading.'

My response is that Reid is concerned throughout his work with practical life, which he uses as a touchstone to test his own theories as well as those of his adversaries. For example, on many occasions Reid says that what doesn't work in a court of law doesn't work in philosophy.[57] The above passage is peculiar because Reid is concerned with an outside perspective on the belief-formation of some subject – a perspective he told us is unavailable to the anatomist of the mind (IHM 13). We want to determine the evidence of someone else. Why would we want to do that? There are in fact many

[57]Think of a philosopher who tells us that the faculty of memory is fallacious. Reid would answer that we can't make something out of it even if it were true, because we are reliant on witness reports in the courts, because we would have to abandon all accounts of history, and because we would not be able to learn, and so on.

occasions in life, including the proceedings of a court, in which we are faced with this situation: to judge whether the subject tells the truth, or whether he is lying. If the situation is one in which a normal subject would have evidence for some belief, and the subject in question claims to have had no belief, he is either lying or deviates from normal processes of belief-formation. Say that our subject walks on an empty road alone in the night. One of the apartments he passes by is burning, but he is not calling the police. The police arrives some time later and interviews the subject. They want to know why he hasn't called the police, given that he 'must have seen' the fire. They can only claim that he must have seen the fire by reference to what beliefs are formed in normal human beings in likewise conditions. If he continues to claim that he didn't see the fire, he is either lying, or not normal.

Now, if we go back to the passage, Reid actually says that, *on most cases*, we measure the degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding. Whereas the above case is one in which it is important to estimate someone's evidence by the effect it would have in a sound mind, the monster case is one in which the same approach would lead us astray. We should assess someone's evidence not on the basis of the effect it has on a sound mind, if we know that the subject in question, for some rare medical reason, differs from us in what is evidence for it. In that case, we would judge the evidence just based on what he *de facto* believes.

Therefore, Rysiew's first reason in support of understanding evidence by reference to what beliefs occur in a sound or healthy human mind, fails. It fails, because the quotation in question is about a sound mind for reasons completely unrelated from issues of conforming to some ideal and doesn't threaten the interpretation of Reidian evidence as non-normative. The general argument, that restrictions of Reid's notion to normal human beings always involve normativity, has been rejected as well.

3.4.4 Textual Evidence for a Normative Notion of Evidence

What remains is presumably yet the strongest reason to ascribe to Reid a normative notion of evidence, and that is the textual evidence itself. I have collected those passages in which Reid seems to employ a merely psychological notion of evidence, but there are also those passages in which Reid clearly uses normative notions.

We can distinguish these into direct and indirect evidence. Among the indirect evidence are passages that involve normativity, like the following:

> All men of common understanding agree, that each [kind] of evidence may afford just ground of belief. (EIP 229)

> I shall take for granted that the evidence of sense, when the proper circumstances concur, is good evidence, and a just ground of belief. (EIP 229)

While these two quotes involve normativity, the normative is added. When improper circumstances occur, the evidence is not a just ground of belief. But it is evidence, and it will be a ground of belief. These passages still allow us to view evidence as not being inherently normative. We can assess evidence normatively, like most notions, but it is not the case that by making a claim about evidence I thereby make a normative claim.

Things are different with the passage below, the only one I would consider to be direct evidence for the view that Reidian evidence is normative. Here, Reid outright says that good evidence ought to govern our belief. Given that it does govern our beliefs, just like bad evidence does, the difference is really irrelevant. We can't choose what to believe, so what should it mean that it ought to govern it? All evidence governs our belief. Only the good should. Maybe it doesn't mean more than that we would be better off if only the good evidence governed our belief, something Reid can subscribe to without abandoning a non-normative notion of evidence.

> All good evidence is commonly called reasonable evidence, and very justly, because it ought to govern our belief as reasonable creatures. (EIP 230)

With respect to the main thesis, that evidence is normative, even this quote, the best my disputants can mount, is restricted to *good* evidence, which might as well be the source the 'ought' derives its normative power from. Just compare it with such sentences as 'All good food ought to be eaten'. They needn't state anything about the normativity of food in general. It is also questionable that the 'ought' is categorical rather than hypothetical. The epistemic reading wants Reid to say something to the effect what should be believed *tout court*, and not merely with respect to some (subjective) aim.

That Reid is not among those who think that all beliefs aim at truth and that we should always try to believe as many truths and as few falsehoods as possible, follows from the following passage:

> If Nature intended to deceive me, and impose upon me by false appearances, and I, by my great cunning and profound logic, have discovered the imposture; prudence would dictate me in this case, even to put up this indignity done me, as quietly as I could, and not to call her an impostor to her face, lest she should be even with me in another way. For what do I gain by resenting this injury? You ought at least not believe what she says. This indeed seems reasonable, if she intends to impose upon me. But what is the consequence? I resolve not to believe my senses. I break my nose against a post that comes in my way [...] (IHM 169-170)

Even if we knew that we were being deceived and that our senses were fallacious, we can't but trust them. As such, the sceptic's demand is absurd. To meet it would mean our certain death, but that isn't even an available option. According to Reid, the beliefs we are constituted to have can't be given up.

A bad belief, a belief we shouldn't have, is a belief that leads to disaster. In evaluating a belief, its truth-value plays a role only insofar truth is often thought to coincide with practical success and aversion of disaster. In the world of the sceptic, however, where truth and practical success diverge from one another, Reid is firmly on the side of practical success, not truth. Therefore, it is not the case that by saying that good evidence ought to govern our belief, Reid adopts a normative notion of evidence (at least not one that is categorical). First, because the 'ought' can derive its power from the occurrence of 'good', and not 'evidence', and second, because the 'ought' is conditional. Only insofar we are, or aspire to be, reasonable creatures, is it the case that good evidence ought to govern our beliefs. In the situation of the sceptic, it wouldn't be reasonable to believe what is true, it would be reasonable to believe falsehoods that helped us to survive or to succeed. So even with regard to the most promising passages, nothing forces us to understand evidence normatively.

We have now discussed Rysiew's three arguments for the thesis that

Reid's notion of evidence is normative and found them wanting. We have also surveyed most of the passages according to which evidence is a descriptive notion. We can proceed, then, with a nonnormative notion of evidence. This marks the end of this chapter. We have established the three theses needed to advance to the discussion of Reid's first principles. The second thesis, that perception is not factive, shows that the first principles don't describe the world as it were. In the next chapter, I will suggest that this does not threaten their truth, as long as we understand them as principles of belief only. That is, his list of first principles can be taken as a description of what beliefs will be formed under what conditions. The first thesis supports this view, because it clarifies that we form these beliefs as a matter of psychological necessity, and normativity makes sense only outside the realm of necessity (as established in 5.1.1). The third thesis disarms the suspicion that Reid understands the first principles as normative because of their self-evidence. As we have seen, this might just mean that the way we come to believe them resembles the way we come to believe axioms. Alternatively, it might mean that they themselves are the ground why we believe them, and nothing more.

Chapter 4

Common Sense, and its Principles

> But I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false.
>
> Wittgenstein, On Certainty, 94

I have shifted the burden of proof to make room for my proposal. I have established three theses that are important for our discussion of Reid's notion of common sense and its principles. This discussion now ensues.

Familiarity with the secondary literature on Reid leads one to believe that common sense and the first principles are confusingly intertwined.[1] To give you an idea, in Marcil-Lacoste's 1982 monograph on Reid and Bouffier she compiled the following collection of different meanings of common sense that interpreters, mostly of the 17th century up to the middle of the 20th, have found in Reid. As can be gathered from the collection, what Reid

[1] In fact, some circumvent the whole issue as far as possible because they deem the question of common sense to be the 'fulcrum upon which the worst interpretations of his corpus swing' (Nichols 2007b: 21). Nichols suggests that one either explains in detail what exactly Reid meant by common sense, or states Reid's views such that they play minimally upon his appeal to common sense (ibid.).

says about first principles is applied to his notion of common sense and *vice versa*, so far so, that, on some proposals, common sense is identified with the list of first principles.

> Because Reid uses the term 'common sense' in a variety of ways, the version of common sense derived from these different references has been held to be confusing. Indeed, although a few commentators on Reid's philosophy insist that his notion of common sense has one central meaning, most commentators have found from two to five different meanings in his uses of the term. These meanings include (1) common sense as a faculty (itself confusingly identified as practical sagacity, intuitive reason, power of the mind, average intelligence, well-balanced intellect); (2) common sense as a set of principles (again, these principles are confusingly identified as ordinary beliefs, self-evident truths, data of consciousness, popular conclusions, intuitive judgments, laws of the mind); and (3) common sense as a doctrine or as a set of assumptions concerning the source of certainty, of evidence, of truth (and these assumptions are confusingly identified as philosophical or popular, as principles of deduction, or as necessary conditions in the exercise of rational powers). (Marcil-Lacoste 1982: 74)

Contemporary scholarship has added to the list, rather than having resolved the issues pertaining to Reid's notion of common sense and his list of first principles. I mention just one more recent dispute that will be relevant later on. It is the dispute whether the first principles are few in number and general in their scope, or many and particular. According to the particularist conception, it would be a first principle that I see a tree now (just as most of my perceptual beliefs would each individually be a first principle), as opposed to it being a first principle that whatever is distinctly perceived really exists, as the generalist would have it.

Each of the interpretations can mount some textual evidence. Therefore, navigating through this becomes a matter of weighing the textual evidence and carefully considering the overall plausibility (with respect to the textual evidence) of the ensuing account we ascribe to Reid. I hope to advance beyond what has been suggested before by taking into consideration his

professed aims and his available methods to reach these aims, together with the theses established in the preceding chapter. This requires a detailed rehearsal of the textual evidence that deals with the topics of common sense and first principles, namely the chapter on common sense and the list of contingent first principles of common sense, both of which are located within the essay *On Judgement* of Reid's EIP. Furthermore, we will look at the chapters immediately pre- and succeeding the list of contingent first principles, as well as extracts from the *Inquiry* and the EAP, to show that we are not basing our interpretation on an exception. To the contrary, our findings are repeated in each of his published works.

The question that motivates much of my efforts, and, at the same time, expresses my puzzlement with much of the contemporary work on Reid, is the following: *Why would there be a heterogeneous list of common sense-principles, some epistemological, some metaphysical (pertaining to both body and mind), despite Reid explicitly giving us one contingent and one necessary list, buried within the sixth essay, titled On Judgement, in a book that tries to describe the mind and its operations by adopting, and limiting itself to, the strictly scientific methods of observation and experiment?*

In what follows, I argue that there is no such list. In place of the epistemological readings, I want to show that there is available a view that has none of the associated problems. According to the interpretation I will give, the list collects the ways in which the faculty of judgement, and more properly, that part of it that Reid refers to as 'common sense', both operates on its own and is involved in the operations of our other faculties. That is, the items on the list are homogeneous and it makes sense that they are located where there are. While it is contingent (either because we are made by God, who could have willed differently, or because we are a result of random evolution) that we are endowed with the principles we have, the list of contingent principles contains those that deal with contingent matters, while the necessary list contains those that deal with necessary matters. They fit precisely into Reid's project of describing the mind and its operations, and his scientific method of observation and experiment is suited to capture and describe them.

Because there seems to be this intimate connection between the principles and common sense, not least because they are called the *principles of common sense*, we will deal with common sense first. While there are

scattered remarks of Reid that suggest that common sense is a list of propositions, the chapter on common sense is clear in that common sense is a faculty. The diverging passages can easily be explained by distinguishing between common sense as a faculty and common sense-beliefs which the faculty produces. Indeed, once it is taken seriously that common sense is a faculty, that raises the question of what that faculty does, what its operations are, and by what mechanisms it achieves its effects. I will argue that the list of first principles constitutes Reid's answer to these questions.

The chapter on common sense is the first source we will draw from in order to state what the nature of Reid's common sense philosophy is. The second consists of the list of contingent common sense principles and the accompanying expositions to each principle. The third source consists of the chapters that directly flank the list of contingent principles, as well as excerpts from the IHM and the EAP.

With regard to the principles, my aim is twofold. In the first instance, I want to establish that the first principles are mental entities. This already contradicts certain readings of Reid, according to which the first principles are primarily non-mental entities, abstract propositions that state under what conditions our beliefs are justified, evident and so on. In the second instance, I will argue that the first principles are not beliefs, but those mental entities that, together with the faculty of judgement, bring about the beliefs in question (which, incidentally, is another meaning of 'principle'). Some epistemic interpreters already share this conception of first principles. Their fault, as I will argue later on, consists in failing to take seriously what this means for the prospect of ascribing any form of normative epistemology to Reid.

The task of interpretation is made difficult by Reid's liberal attitude regarding the term 'principle'. Reid applies the term to a variety of kinds of things, including minds, laws, axioms, and both particular and general beliefs. Not surprisingly, then, the properties and marks that Reid associates with first principles in his chapter *Of first principles in general* appear to be in conflict with some of the passages that feature principle-talk. This also means that it is an open question what the items on Reid's list of first principles really are. Although it is typically done, we can't assume, without argument, that they are one rather than the other thing – say, laws, rather than beliefs. Therefore, in order to determine just what exactly the

principles on Reid's list are, I will begin with a very narrow textual basis and proceed on a step-by-step basis to more inclusive passages. That way, I hope to extract what Reid actually says about *his* lists of first principles from his more general remarks about judgement and first principles. Given that there will be differences between the two, I give priority to remarks that lie closer to his discussion of the principles on the list. What will emerge, then, is not so much Reid's general account of first principles (if he even has one), as it is an account of the actual principles recorded on his lists.

Accordingly, we will begin with Reid's notion of common sense as it is expounded in the second chapter of the sixth essay, entitled *Of common sense* (4.1). The result will be that common sense is a part of the faculty of judgement. Afterwards, we begin with the first principles, initially focusing only on the list of the twelve (contingent) principles itself (4.2). We will see that, given the theses already established, the range of possible views about what the first principles are is already severely limited. Afterwards we widen our view to the expositions Reid accompanies each principle with (4.3). The expositions will show that Reid switches back and forth between two conceptions of first principles, first principles *as* beliefs and first principles *of* belief. In section 4.4, we will take into account the broader context and review that material which is relevant, the list of necessary principles, his general remarks on first principles, and the type of principles that features both in the EAP and IHM.

4.1 Of Common Sense

The term 'common sense' occurs in different contexts throughout Reid's work, for example, to say that something is shocking to common sense, or as what opposes philosophy or reason (in a positive sense). These remarks are compatible with most accounts of what common sense is. Sometimes, however, Reid seems to commit himself to the view that common sense is a body of propositions or beliefs, as in the following passage:

> Such original and natural judgements are therefore a part of the furniture which nature hath given to the human understanding. They are the inspiration of the Almighty, no less than our notions or simple apprehensions. They serve to direct us in the common affairs of life, where our reasoning faculty would leave us in the

> dark. They are a part of our constitution, and all the discoveries of our reason are grounded upon them. They make up what is called *the common sense of mankind*; and what is contrary to any of those first principles, is what we call *absurd*. (IHM 215)

Passages like this appear from time to time, but they never systematically explain what common sense is, nor are they part of such an explanation. But such an explanation is given in the chapter *Of common sense*, located in the essay *Of Judgement*. There, Reid suggests that common sense is a faculty, or more properly, a part, or degree, of the faculty of judgement (which is as good as it gets in terms of explaining why that chapter is where it is).

Reid begins the chapter by emphasizing that common sense is a sense. This, according to him, has been neglected in philosophy, but Reid attempts to show that it is the ordinary meaning and that there are some philosophers who have been treating common sense as a sense. As already mentioned, Reid thinks that common sense is a degree of the faculty of judgement. The chapter is almost entirely comprised of his attempt to specify the degree by different descriptions. For the most part, these are social descriptions, like the following:

> Common sense is that degree of judgement which is common to men with whom we can converse and transact business. (EIP 424)

Further elaborating on this social theme, Reid finds that the distribution of the ability to reason and to judge correctly is not equal among mankind. Still, some degree of it is necessary to function in society. This minimum-degree is what he calls common sense.

> This inward light or sense is given by Heaven to different persons in different degrees. There is a certain 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. (EIP 426)

Rather than being an obscure notion, Reid thinks about common sense in very practical terms, going so far as to claim that we could determine its absence by how people talk, act and even look.

> The laws of all civilized nations distinguish those who have this gift of Heaven, from those who have it not. The last may have rights which ought not to be violated, but having no understanding in themselves to direct their actions, the laws appoint them to be guided by the understanding of others. It is easily discerned by its effects in men's actions, in their speeches, and even in their looks; and when it is made a question, whether a man has this natural gift or not, a judge or a jury, upon a short conversation with him, can, for the most part, determine the question with great assurance. (EIP 426)

Shortly after, he adds that there might be legitimate disputes about the exact limits, but that both the notion of common sense, and the lack of it, are intelligible.[2]

Besides this social theme, Reid also specifies the degree of judgement that he calls common sense by its function in reasoning.

> 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. Hence it is, that disputes very often terminate in an appeal to common sense. (EIP 426)

Reid concludes, 'From this it is natural to think, that common sense should mean common judgement; and so it really does' (EIP 427).

And this already concludes the material offered in the chapter on common sense.[3] One might wonder how one comes to take common sense to be something different than a part of the faculty of judgement. I assume

[2] At EIP 453 he compares the situation with a man standing on a threshold. It is dubious whether he is inside or outside, but that doesn't obscure the notions of being inside and being outside.

[3] I have omitted a passage in which Reid mentions that common sense is (also?) a degree of reason, namely that degree which judges of things self-evident (EIP 433). Since my main point is that it is a faculty, and not a set of propositions or beliefs, I gladly skip over the issue of the relationship between reason and judgement.

that is due to those passages (like the one quoted in the beginning of this chapter), in which Reid seems to say that common sense is a set of beliefs, propositions or truths.[4] For those who think that common sense is identical to the first principles, or at least in some close way related to them, the chapter leading up to the lists of principles, *Of first principles in general*, which we will discuss in 4.4.2, at least also supports the view that common sense is a set of beliefs.

Now, if we take such passages to be more authoritative than what Reid tells us in the only chapter on common sense there is, what do we make of the latter? It is just much more plausible to hold that Reid conceives common sense as a part of the faculty of judgement and that he sometimes, especially when the discussion is not about common sense, intermingles the beliefs that result from common sense and common sense proper.[5] Therefore, we will proceed with an account of common sense as a part or degree of the faculty of judgement.

4.2 Reid's First Principles

Reid's list of first principles is situated within his sixth essay *Of Judgement*. The list itself consists of twelve principles,[6] each accompanied with a little exposition, whose relevance and content we have to determine in the next section (4.3). Here, then, is the list of twelve principles Reid proposes.

> 1. *First*, then, I hold, as a first principle, the existence of every thing of which I am conscious.
> 2. Another first principle, I think, is, That the thoughts of which I am conscious, are the thoughts of a being which I call *myself*, my *mind*, my *person*.
> 3. Another first principle I take to be, That those things did really happen which I distinctly remember.

[4] Another example would be IHM 33: 'If there are certain principles [...] which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, [...] these are what we call the principles of common sense.'

[5] Note that the examples come from the IHM, whereas the chapter on common sense is part of the EIP. So these passages are not only remote in terms of relevance to the topic at hand, they are also literally remote, being written 20 years before the publication of the EIP.

[6] He tells us that such lists are seldom perfect and that there might be more principles (EIP 490).

> 4. Another first principle is our own personal identity and continued existence, as far back as we remember any thing distinctly.
> 5. 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.
> 6. Another first principle, I think, is, That we have some degree of power over our actions, and the determinations of our will.
> 7. Another first principle is, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious.
> 8. Another first principle relating to existence, is, That there is life and intelligence in our fellow-men with whom we converse.
> 9. Another first principle I take to be, That certain features of the countenance, sounds of the voice, and gestures of the body, indicate certain thoughts and dispositions of mind.
> 10. Another first principle appears to me to be, That there is a certain regard due to human testimony in matters of fact, and even to human authority in matters of opinion.
> 11. There are many events depending upon the will of man, in which there is a self-evident probability, greater or less, according to circumstances.
> 12. The last principle of contingent truths I mention is, That, in the phaenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar circumstances. (EIP 470-489)

Now, on a certain, initially compelling, reading, some of the first principles would make purely ontological claims, some would state a relation between us and the world and some would ascribe powers to us. Thus, this reading takes the twelfth principle to state that the universe is uniform (and therefore, we are justified in inductive reasoning), it takes the fifth principle to state the factivity of perception (and therefore, we are justified in forming the perceptual beliefs we do form), and so on.[7] Here, for example, is Van Cleve on the mixed content that is contained within Reid's list:[8]

[7] Some go as far as to skip this step of reasoning and simply interpret some of the principles as containing epistemic terminology. The most notable instance of this is Alston (1985: 437), whose rendition of the fifth principle states that 'perceptual beliefs about the immediate environment are generally true'.

[8] Another example is Rysiew (2014: 175), who suggests that the principles are metaphysical in that they relate to existence: they tell me that the various acts of the mind of

> Some of the principles in the list are purely or primarily metaphysical; for example, Principle 2 tells us that thoughts require a thinker, and Principle 6 tells us that we have some degree of power over our actions. But others are plainly intended to have epistemological significance, proclaiming the trustworthiness of consciousness (Principle 1), memory (Principle 3), perception (Principle 5), our faculties in general (Principle 7) [...]. (Van Cleve 2015: 301)

Although Van Cleve distinguishes metaphysical from epistemological principles, it is useful to characterise this whole reading as metaphysical, in the sense that it takes the principles to be truths about the world (as opposed to them being limited to being about the mind and its operations). Accordingly, even the epistemic looking principles would also be metaphysical in this sense, because they are not limited to the mental. They say something about minds and the mind-independent world (as in, whenever we distinctly perceive, the world is as we perceive it). As the next two sections discuss, this metaphysical reading is inconsistent with Reid's explicitly non-factive account of perception, among other things. It wouldn't be an option to have the principles be false, not least because Reid occasionally refers to them as being true.[9] Therefore, we have to find a different reading, one that better conforms to the evidence.

The next two sections take a look at the principles stripped of their context. Their purpose is to counter the first impression that the principles are in fact metaphysical. That is, they don't yet contain knock-down arguments, but merely aim to invoke doubt. Afterwards, we will shortly discuss Van Cleve's argument that the items on Reid's list are actually ambiguous between themselves being first principles and statements about what first principles there are (without themselves being first principles). Finally, in 4.3, we place the principles in their context, primarily the accompanying expositions, and show that Reid conceives the principles on the list to be principles that produce beliefs.

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which I am conscious (FP#1), the events I distinctly remember (FP#3), and the things that I distinctly perceive (FP#5) around me, *do really exist* or *did really happen*'.

[9] If we want to be more precise, the list collects statements about principles, which Reid takes to be true, whereas principles will turn out to be mental entities that produce beliefs (and which, therefore, lack a truth-value).

4.2.1 Epistemological Principles?

The epistemological readings of Reid focus almost entirely on principles 3, 5 and 7, because they take them to state that perception, memory, and all our faculties are, depending on the specific reading, sources of truth, evidence or justification. Let us take a more detailed look at principles 3 and 5, beginning with the former.

> 3. Another first principle I take to be, That those things did really happen which I distinctly remember. (EIP 474)

Without context, it looks as if it states the factivity of memory. If the things that are distinctly remembered did happen, this would suggest that remembering involves a relation that requires both a subject and a past event to hold.[10] More importantly, together with the assumption that the principle under this interpretation is true, there is no more reason not to trust memory. It gives us certainty and justification, if not truth, in a very straightforward way.

The above stands in stark contrast to what Reid has told his readers earlier, namely that in remembrance, what we remember might have happened, just as it might not have happened. It would be false to think that remembrance only happens when the remembered event has happened, no matter whether we remember distinctly or not.

> When I believe that I washed my hands and face this morning, there appears no necessity in the truth of this proposition. It might be, or it might not be. A man may distinctly conceive it without believing it at all. How, then, do I come to believe it? I remember it distinctly. This is all I can say. This remembrance is an act of my mind. Is it impossible that this act should be, if the event had not happened? I confess I do not see any necessary connection between the one and the other. (EIP 256)

Therefore, the metaphysical reading according to which whenever we (distinctly) remember some event, that event has really happened, is ruled out. It simply doesn't reflect Reid's opinion on the matter.

[10] Reid is no philosopher of time, and would be unmoved by the usual metaphysical concerns. It is also not necessary to flesh out the principle like this, but it would be a natural suggestion. Of course, Reid could also hold that to remember is a mental state that coincides with past events such that there always happens to be a corresponding past event when we distinctly remember.

As we have already seen in chapter 3.3, the same is true about perception. Read in isolation, the fifth principle seems to state the factivity of perception, that whenever we (distinctly) perceive some object, that object exists.

> 5. Another first principle is, That those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be. (EIP 476)

But we have already seen that Reid thinks that perception is not factive: Reid thinks that our perception of some object is consistent with the object failing to exist. On pain of contradiction, it can't be that the principle states what it initially, and read in isolation, seems to state. Therefore, both with memory and perception, we are faced with inconsistency as long as we understand the principles to be descriptive in this metaphysical sense.[11]

This leaves us with three options. First, given that Reid calls them 'first principles', we could think that they have priority over other remarks of his, and that we should reinterpret or discard all passages that contradict the first principles. Secondly, we could say that they describe how we should view the world rather than describe how the world actually is. The third principle would tell us that we should trust our memory, although it is not the case that whatever we remember did happen. Lastly, in line with the core thesis of this dissertation, the list of principles could be limited to the mental realm. For example, if first principles are particular beliefs, as Van Cleve suggests, the items on the list would merely describe what beliefs we form. Or, if principles are the entities by means of which the faculty produces belief, the items on the list could refer to these entities by means of generalizing the conditions under which the belief is produced.

The *first* option, to view the rest of his work through the lens of the first principles, should only be considered if there is no way to understand his work such that the principles and the remainder of his work are consistent with each other. Insofar as I succeed to establish and defend my thesis, this option is not attractive.

[11] I have postponed the discussion of the expositions to chapter 4.3, but the way Reid begins and ends these is already very telling. If they were metaphysical, wouldn't he tell us, at least in these moments? Instead, concluding, for example, the exposition to the third principle, he says: 'When I remember a thing distinctly, I disdain equally to hear reasons for it or against it. And so I think does every man in his senses' (EIP 476). The epistemological question, whether this is acceptable behaviour, arises at no point.

The *second* is implausible because Reid has no means available to reach normative conclusions. This is, because as merely normative principles, they are not scientific. They are immune to observations and can't be tested by experiments. Universal features of languages say nothing about how the world is supposed to be. That is, all methods that Reid has available wouldn't allow him to find the principles if their content is exclusively normative.[12] We'll come back to the issue of normativity in chapter 5, and when dealing with particular proposals of Reid being an epistemologist, in chapter 6.[13] Now, we'll continue to explore the *third* option, that the principles are mental entities, the 'innate programs' producing our beliefs (those that are immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary).

To a first approximation of that view, the third principle produces the particular memorial beliefs, such as the memorial belief that I had a soup yesterday, and the fifth principle yields the particular perceptual beliefs, such as the belief that there is a computer in front of me, a picture on the wall, and so on. Excepting pathological cases, these principles are innate, part of our constitution, and produce these beliefs individually. Your third principle probably won't produce the belief that you had soup yesterday, although it might even happen that you didn't have soup and still believe it (as a result of the third principle). We sometimes choke when eating, as a result of our bodily functions tripping over themselves. There is no reason why the same shouldn't happen within the mental realm. We are imperfect both with regard to body and mind.[14] If we want to include the fact that ultimately, the faculty of judgement produces judgements and resulting beliefs, the most promising way to express this would be to say that the faculty of judgement produces the resultant belief by means of the relevant first principle. Just like a pump without piping would spread

[12]We will see later that some interpreters combine this option with other readings: for example, they take the principles to be laws of thought, but at the same time as stating that beliefs arising in accordance with the law are justified. In this case, Reid would have the means to arrive at the law of thought, but still no means to corroborate the normative dimension which the reading assumes to exist.

[13]What he could find is that we are constituted such that we value certain practices and blame others, but this isn't what the epistemologist is after. That would be the fact that we are objectively right to value and blame as we do. And what experiment would reveal that?

[14]You might object that there are philosophers that disagree on a seemingly empirical level in that they report to have the ability to lay off such beliefs or to pass over the production of said beliefs. Reid answers with variants of the apraxia-objection: Their deeds reveal that they either lie or impose upon themselves. See, for example, EIP 481.

its water everywhere uncontrollably, the faculty of judgement requires first principles that direct its powers.[15]

I will return to this issue and state the full account as soon as we have closed this exercise of viewing the principles stripped of their context, in 4.3. Now, we have already seen that the metaphysical reading fails at least for those principles the epistemologist is most interested in, namely principles 3 and 5. In the next section, we will take a look at the principles whose content qualifies as broadly metaphysical.

4.2.2 Metaphysical Principles?

As I have already expressed above, according to the initial impression, the list features metaphysical principles in the sense that they seem to be about the world as such, which includes, but isn't limited to, minds. Insofar the epistemological principles are about the relationships between mind and the mind-independent world, even they are metaphysical in this sense (however, they wouldn't be if they were merely normative – it depends on the precise interpretation). Other principles are metaphysical in the more classical sense of that term, i.e., they deal with topics such as personal identity, the existence of other minds, or the uniformity of the world.

Taking these principles to be metaphysical (as opposed to limited to the mental realm) is not as bad as with the epistemological principles above, but their precise formulation could cast some doubt that the initial impression is correct. That the initial impression is indeed wrong will appear as soon as we view the principles in light of their expositions in the next chapter.

For example, if we take a close look at the twelfth principle, that the future conforms to the past, what Reid is *really* saying is that '[...] what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar circumstances' (EIP 488). On my reading, it says that there is a principle which produces the belief that, with regard to natural phaenomena, we think the future will probably be like the past.

As a metaphysical first principle, it would say that the future conforms to the past more than half the time (assuming that this is the contribution

[15] A passage from the EAP supports this metaphor: 'We may observe, that men who have exercised their rational powers, are generally governed in their opinions by fixed principles of belief; [...] without [which], there would be no steadiness and consistence in our belief [...]' (EAP 68).

of the 'probably'). There is in principle nothing wrong with such a view, although I find it quite impractical as a *first* principle. But to ascribe such a principle to Reid is implausible. Reid cherishes the scientific method of induction and those scientists that closely followed it. If he were committed to a metaphysical first principle which entailed that this method works only roughly half the time, we end up ascribing to Reid a position he simply didn't endorse. In fact, Reid's reliance on observation and experiment presuppose that the universe is close to uniform. If anything, experimentation and observation, the methods available to Reid, would support a much stronger principle. If instead we were to give priority to the principle over his methods, we would make Reid an armchair philosopher. This would be highly inconsistent with his remarks on method. In conclusion, we can't ascribe to Reid the view that the universe is probably uniform.

Although the twelfth principle isn't the only one that features vague or weak terminology, it is the only one that would lead to inconsistencies. The sixth principle says that we have 'some degree' of power over our actions and the tenth principle states that there is a 'certain regard due to human testimony'. Finally, the ninth says that 'certain features of the countenance [...] indicate certain thoughts and dispositions of mind' (EIP 484). Reid *could* hold that these are metaphysical first principles, but I find it to be much more plausible that their vagueness or weakness is a result of them being common sense principles. The weaker the principles, the more inclusive they are. Therefore, Reid has an incentive to formulate them such that they can be ascribed to the greatest possible number of humans. Some believe they have full power over their actions, some think it depends, and some think we have almost no power over our actions. If we want to include them all, we have to give the principle a formulation like the one Reid chose.

Thus, even if we consider them in isolation, there are some obstacles to the view that the principles are metaphysical. When we consider them in light of their accompanying expositions, as we do in the next chapter (4.3), it becomes clear that they can't be. Instead, they are limited to the mental realm and say nothing about the mind-independent world. Not as such, and not in relationship to any minds.

4.2.3 General or Particular?

One further point of discussion that pertains to the exact formulation of the principles is Van Cleve's (2015: 302 ff.) claim of ambiguity. According to it, each item on the list is actually ambiguous between a proposition, itself not a first principle, that states what first principles there are (where, formally speaking, the first-principle-operator is embedded within the proposition) and a proposition that is itself a first principle (where, formally speaking, the first-principle-operator embeds the rest of the proposition). For example, the fifth principle would be ambiguous between saying that whatever we perceive is a first principle, giving us as many particular first principles as there are perceptions among mankind, and saying that it is a first principle that whatever we perceive exists, being just one general first principle. Or to rephrase, according to the former view, the items on the list are about what first principles there are, whereas on the latter view, the items on the list are, for example, about perception and its objects.

Van Cleve decides that the particularist conception is the one that Reid affirms, on grounds which we discuss and reject below. But that leaves the textual evidence intact, and we should explain it as best as we can, even if we reject Van Cleve's theory.

The way Van Cleve approaches the topic is by considering the principles as epistemic. He further distinguishes epistemic principles into principles of evidence and principles of truth. Take the fifth principle, for example. According to Van Cleve (2015: 306), the generalist formalization would render it a principle of truth.

5.1 It is a first principle that $\forall p(Pp \rightarrow p)$

The same principle as a principle of evidence would be formalized thus.

5.2 $\forall p(Pp \rightarrow$ it is a first principle that $p)$[16]

The idea is that 5.1 states that whatever we perceive is true (this itself being a first principle), whereas 5.2 states that whatever we perceive is a first principle. And since, according to Van Cleve, the status of being a first principle is to be explicated in terms of immediate evidence, we have here principles of evidence rather than truth. As Van Cleve puts it,

[16]The formalization is Van Cleve's, except that I have expressed the universal quantification as above, whereas Van Cleve formulation lacks the usual symbol (he simply writes '(p)').

> principles of truth contribute to our knowledge by being evident;
> principles of evidence contribute to our knowledge by being true.
> (Van Cleve 2015: 311)

Of course, this requires further theses to be true. For example, only given externalism about these matters will it be true that we simply have to fall under the principle in order for it to contribute to our knowledge. If internalism is true, truth wouldn't suffice. We'd also need to have access to the principle itself – making impossible the bootstrapping envisaged by Van Cleve.

In the end, Van Cleve finds the textual evidence to be non-decisive. Sometimes it speaks in favour of Reid holding a particularist conception of first principles, and sometimes it speaks in favour of a generalist conception. One thing we could take away from this is that Reid has two conceptions of first principles, but Van Cleve claims that 5.1 is the true form of the items on the list, because in that way, Reid would make an interesting and promising contribution to epistemology.[17]

In this, Van Cleve's approach to Reid couldn't be more different than what I am trying to achieve here, which is to offer a reading that doesn't have to discard half of the passages regarding any issue. Besides this methodological difference, our previous results also speak against both the generalist and the particularist formalization. That is, because we have already established that perception is not factive, while 5.1 states that whenever we perceive that p, it is true that p. At the same time, if 5.2 is the correct formalization of the items on the list, the items on the list are not first principles, contrary to everything Reid tells us about them. And while to simply claim ambiguity helps at explaining away those passages in which he assigns first principles status to particular perceptions, I think we can do better.

Rather than favouring one notion over the other, and thereby discarding half of the available evidence, I will suggest a reading that explains why Reid sometimes speaks about particular beliefs as first principles, and why,

[17] Another presupposition of Van Cleve is that all evidence is equal. But this could be contested. Just as we took Reid's chapter on common sense to be more relevant for his notion of common sense than his scattered remarks, the things Reid explicitly lists as first principles (which are predominantly general) might be more relevant to what his notion of first principles is than the occasional remark featuring a particular proposition as a first principle.

at the same time, the items on the list are first principles as well. On top of this, prior to Van Cleve's chapter on Reid's epistemology, when he is still focussing on Reid's theory of signs and his nativism, van Cleve himself brings this notion of first principles into play.

Much earlier in his book, Van Cleve seems to be aware of this other conception of first principles as principles *of* beliefs. In his discussion of Reid's nativism, he distinguishes different correlations between signs and beliefs. Speaking about one way of correlation between sign and belief among natural signs, Van Cleve says the following:[18]

> The correlation between X and Y is known by a principle of our constitution – we are innately programmed to believe it. (Van Cleve 2015: 38)

Faculties, on this view, would be the machines and principles the hardwired programs directing and governing their operations. For reasons unapproachable to me, when it comes to Van Cleve's discussion of first principles, this conception is simply absent. Interestingly, although much more conscious of his choice, Alston (1985) makes a similar move. Right in the beginning of his article, without any reasons offered, he proposes, and, of course, adheres to his proposal throughout his piece, the following:

> First principles turn out to be a heterogenous assortment indeed. Let's leave aside the use of 'principle' for a psychological faculty or disposition, and restrict ourselves to principles as certain kinds of propositions. (Alston 1985: 435)

Alston misses that they are heterogenous only if we understand them as propositions rather than mental entities. Nevertheless, it is precisely this conception that is the most plausible for what the items on Reid's list refer to. This will be clearer once we place Reid's first principles into their context.

4.3 Reid's First Principles in Context

Reid accompanies each principle with at least a couple of paragraphs (with the exception of the fourth principle, which only features one paragraph).

[18] This metaphor is already employed by Lehrer (1989a: 150): 'The doxastic output of the innate principles of such systems, which are analogous to the programs of an information processing system, are the beliefs of common sense.'

This survey of textual evidence will reveal that at no point does Reid understand the principles as non-mental. They are understood either as beliefs or as that which yields (or in Reid's terminology, 'suggests') beliefs.

As for the negative part of my thesis, that Reid's project is best construed as descriptive psychology, both conceptions can fit – as long as on the view of principles as beliefs, they are not in addition also epistemic principles, as some would have it.[19] Because my project also aims to describe Reid's descriptive psychology, albeit focussed on his notion of common sense, I still want to settle the matter, as best as such things can be settled.

Another way to frame this is by observing that the purely ontological project, settling what exactly principles *are*, is different from the question what their function is in Reid's philosophy – for us, this boils down to the question whether they are normative. Consequently, we can distinguish two questions: firstly, what kind of entity is a principle? If a mental entity, a particular belief, a general belief, or the source thereof? If non-mental, a law? And secondly, are these normative or descriptive? Are they yielding justification and knowledge, or do they merely describe what beliefs we have? The two questions are only loosely connected. In our case, if we find out that the principles are principles of belief, it could still be the case that Reid takes beliefs so produced to be justified, evident, or to constitute knowledge (just as principles as laws could be understood more akin to the ten commandments or the laws of physics).

One reason why the view of principles as principles of beliefs is superior to the view of principles as beliefs is that the former can explain the evidence for the latter much better than *vice versa*. Thus, we can incorporate Reid's reference to first principles as 'convictions' and 'knowledge' by highlighting that, on the proposed account of first principles as origins of belief, we have no way of knowing the first principles except by means of their effects. Introspection reveals that the faculty governs our belief not randomly, but systematically (just as Van Cleve's metaphor that they are innate programs). Whenever certain inputs are given, the faculty responds accordingly, whether we want it or not.[20] Reid's 'lapse' would then be to

[19] Discussion of what they might be in addition is postponed until the next chapter. Note that the fact that they can't be true as descriptions of the world is making this already a much more difficult endeavour than envisaged by proponents of an epistemic reading.

[20] Although this could tempt us to view faculties as passive, this wouldn't be consistent

call a cause by the name of its effect. His excuse would be that we have no grasp of the cause except by said effect.[21]

Additionally, if we take the fifth principle for example, 'That those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be' (EIP 476), Reid can't state all those beliefs we would *de facto* have as a result of this principle. He is forced to generalize, but not because the resultant belief is general. It is because he can't state all the beliefs effected by this principle. That these beliefs are the result of a first principle explains why they are antecedent to all reasoning.

For better illustration, picture a conversation with Reid that starts with Hume's proclamation that

> We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* but 'tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings. (T 1.4.2.1)

Reid agrees, and takes on the question why we ascribe an existence to perceived bodies that is independent of our mind and perception. His answer is that it is a first principle that whenever we distinctly perceive an object, we believe it to exist mind-independently. We could press Reid and claim that, actually, we rarely believe in the existence of body generally. Instead, we believe particular things. For example, I believe that the table in front of me exists, and that the objects constituting the chaos on its surface exist. And it is implausible that our constitution makes reference to such objects (especially so since most people sit in front of their own tables, and their own chaos). Yes, says Reid, what is part of our constitution is the general principle that makes us believe of any object that we distinctly perceive that it exists.

The second sentence in the quote from Hume also explains why Reid, outside of the list of his first principles, also uses the term 'first principle' to refer to certain beliefs. Because we must take them for granted in all our reasoning. And this, also, is a meaning of the term 'first principle'.[22]

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with Reid's conception of the mind as being active.

[21] In this regard, Reid follows the traditional view of individuating faculties by their objects and effects, which we have discussed in 3.1 of this work.

[22] Somerville (1987: 425) agrees, although he is less happy about it: '[Reid] confuses these principles of human nature with the beliefs they compel.'

Because it fits the discussion, here is a part of the exposition to the seventh principle that addresses this point.

> It is another property of this and of many first principles, that they force assent in particular instances, more powerfully than when they are turned into a general proposition. (EIP 482)

What we have here are three things: particular instances, first principles and general propositions. First principles force assent in particular instances. When we turn these particular instances into a general proposition, the first principle forces the assent to that general proposition less powerfully.

The most important point is that no two of these three components are identical, meaning first principles are neither particular instances nor those general propositions we could form from a generalization of instances. Are we to think that the particular instances are instances of the principle, in the same sense in which $Fa \to Ga$ is an instance of $\forall x(Fx \to Gx)$? At another occasion, Reid seems to suggest, or at least opens up the space of possible interpretations towards the view, that an instance would more properly be the consequent, the particular proposition Ga in this case, rather than the full conditional.[23]

> [Locke] observes, that the particular propositions contained under a general axiom are no less self-evident than the general axiom, and that they are sooner known and understood. Thus it is as evident, that my hand is less than my body, as that part is less than the whole; and I know the truth of the particular proposition, sooner than that of the general. (EIP 521)

Finally, you might think that the fact that a principle has instances to which it forces assent, is evidence for the view that principles, even understood as principles of belief, are propositional.[24] In ascribing to Reid either view, I think we go beyond the material he has offered us. Since nothing hinges on this matter, I will leave the question of their propositionality open.

[23] This observation is due to Van Cleve (2015: 308), who takes these passages to be evidence for his view that the items on the list state what (particular) first principles there are, rather than themselves being (general) first principles. Another example of this is given at EIP 504, where Reid takes a particular application of a general principle to be the particular consequent Ga, not the conditional $Fa \to Ga$.

[24] Sosa & Van Cleve (2001: 195) at one point suggest that principles are patterns of inference, which would be distinct from particular beliefs yielded by them, but retain a propositional form.

To come back to the expositions, the division of this section corresponds to these two conceptions. The first part surveys expositions that conceive of first principles as what effects our beliefs, including a first outline of how this interpretation works. The second part surveys those that conceive of first principles as beliefs, including discussion on how to deal with this piece of seemingly contradictory evidence. Some expositions don't contribute to the discussion of what the principles are. For brevity's sake I have excluded these from the upcoming discussion.

4.3.1 Principles of Beliefs

We'll begin the discussion with the twelfth principle because it serves as a good example of Reid's conception of principles as principles of beliefs. This is followed by an exploration of the meaning of 'principle'. Lastly, I will briefly present further expositions that are also best understood as conforming to the view that the principles are principles of belief.

In the exposition immediately following the twelfth principle, 'That, in the phaenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in similar circumstances' (EIP 489), Reid states that the principle is part of our constitution. In line with the metaphysical reading, we could think that the twelfth principle describes a feature of the world. That this is a metaphysical principle stating that the world is such that under like conditions the future will be probably like the past. I have already discussed the occurrence of 'probably' within the principle's formulation. This time, the focus is on how Reid continues to speak about the twelfth principle. The immediate next sentence following the principle refers back to the principle as a 'conviction [we must have] as soon as we are capable of learning any thing from experience', which would suggest that first principles are beliefs. In the next paragraph, however, Reid continues by saying that although we can later confirm it by reason, 'the principle is necessary for us before we are able to discover it by reasoning, and therefore [it] is made part of our constitution, and produces its effects before the use of reason' (EIP 489). These effects are judgements and convictions, as the other expositions make clear (note that we are moving in reverse chronological order, since the other expositions are prior to this one).[25]

[25] Actions, because they not only depend on beliefs, but on volition as well, are the effects of principles of action, which Reid sets out in his *Essays on the Active Powers of*

According to this, the principles are not beliefs, but they are mental entities, part of our constitution, and they produce beliefs (the 'innate programs' by which our faculties work). Reid goes so far as to call beliefs the effects of first principles, which suggests that first principles are causes of beliefs. Because of Reid's view that only agents can be real causes, Reid would describe the relation between the first principles and beliefs as suggestion, although he commonly employs such terms as 'effects', 'produces'.

Whereas this is far away from contemporary interpretations of Reid, both early modern and contemporary dictionaries record this meaning of 'principle' besides the more usual meanings. Thus, from the 1775 edition of Nathan Bailey's *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, we find that 'principle' can mean: '1. The first cause of the Being or Production of any Thing; A Motive or Inducement; 2. among Moralists: Maxims or undoubted Truths; good practical Rules of Action; as a Man who acts according to the known Parts of Religion and Morality is said, *to be a Man of Principles.*' Here, the epistemological reading needs something like the latter meaning, the descriptive psychological reading requires the first.

While some of the other early modern dictionaries coincide with the above entry, there are two notable exceptions. First is the 1730 *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum*, which features, under the entry for 'First Principle', the following: 'A Thing that is self-evident, and, as it were, naturally known.' Secondly, there is Samuel Johnson's 1768 *A Dictionary of the English language*, which lists the following: '1. Element; constituent part; primordial substance; 2. Original Cause; 3. Being productive of other being; operative cause; 4. Fundamental truth; original postulate; first position from which others are deduced; 5. Ground of action; motive; 6. Tenet on which morality is founded.' Here, again, the descriptive psychological reading can utilize the first three entries (four, if 'fundamental' is read descriptively, whereas the epistemological reading needs to read 'fundamental' normatively).

Lastly, in contemporary dictionaries, although not among the first entries, we still find these meanings. For example, in *Webster's II New College Dictionary*, two entries stick out for us: '9. Originating or actuating agency or force. 10. Instinct, faculty or natural tendency of mind or character.'

Therefore, although uncommon to our ears, Reid saying these things,[26]

Man, not of the principles on the list given here (although they are of course relevant for the production of actions).

[26]At EAP 51, Reid says 'We have reason therefore to think, that, to every being to

and us taking them seriously in this meaning, is fully in line with the ordinary language of Reid's time. Although not common, this meaning has survived until now, and, as we saw in Van Cleve's metaphor of the innate program and Alston's comment regarding the 'use of "principle" for a psychological faculty or disposition', is still floating around.[27]

Another clue that Reid understands principles as what effects beliefs is that Hume often uses 'principle' in the same way.[28]

> When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determin'd by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination. (T 1.3.6.12)

That is, Hume suggests an answer to the question why we have the beliefs we have by pointing towards the principle that is responsible for effecting our beliefs.[29] The same usage occurs when he tells us, in a passage that could be Reid's as much as it is Hume's, that custom is a principle of belief.

> Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom,

whom God hath given any degree of active power, he hath also given some principles of action, for the direction of that power to the end for which it was intended.' The faculty of judgement is a power whose end is to furnish us with beliefs, and thus, is supplied with principles of belief (rather than action), that guide it to accomplish its end. This, at least, would be the result if we transfer the meaning of 'principle' from the cited passage to other powers.

[27] Lehrer (1989b: 8) also summarizes Reid's position as follows: 'These principles are innate principles of our constitution, yielding conception and conviction of the operation of our own minds, of the minds of others, of the qualities of external objects, and of the laws of nature.' It is just that, when Lehrer comes to the discussion of the principles, he too conceives them as beliefs that have to be true.

[28] As Walsh (2017: 196) points out, Newton also used the term in two ways: there are propositional principles and ontic principles, the latter of which, according to Walsh, have the following four features: an ontic principle is the thing itself, rather than being about a thing. It functions as a cause and is known from the phenomena. Lastly, it is not truth-apt.

[29] In any case, Reid understands it in precisely this way: 'His belief, therefore, is not grounded on evidence. It is the result of his constitution. [...] For what is called the association of ideas is a law of nature in our constitution; which produces its effects without any operation of reason on our part, and in a manner of which we are entirely ignorant' (EAP 88).

> we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends, or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action, as well as of the chief part of speculation. (Enquiry 5.6)

Before we close the discussion of the twelfth exposition, there is one further detail that deserves comment. A general strategy to resist my interpretation would be to drive a wedge between the expositions and the principles. For example, one could argue that the exposition states additional facts, about our mental operations and so on. Accordingly, the principle would be a metaphysical proposition, and the exposition would find that our mental life adheres to the metaphysical reality described by the principle. The principles would state that the future conforms to the past, and the exposition would record that, by the way, we also believe that the future conforms to the past and that this belief serves important practical ends.

This strategy fails, because Reid links the principle and exposition together by having the exposition refer back to the principle as that which brings about beliefs. In saying that *this principle*, meaning the one described by the item on the list, is part of our constitution, he makes clear that the exposition is about the principle, rather than stating additional mental facts about a metaphysical principle.

Reid's exposition to the tenth principle, 'That there is a certain regard due to human testimony in matters of fact, and even to human authority in the matters of opinion' (EIP 487), strengthens this thesis. After a short elaboration that children would never reach the age of reason without this principle, he ends with a paragraph stating that the principles regulate our judgements and opinions.

> The natural principles, by which our judgements and opinions are regulated before we come to the use of reason, 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. (EIP 488)

It is unclear what Reid would talk about here if not the tenth principle in particular and all twelve of them in general. If principles are something that

regulate our opinions and judgements, they have to be something mental. Indeed, by calling them 'natural', Reid emphasizes that they are part of our constitution, as opposed to something we acquired along the way. Finally, Reid compares them to natural instincts, which we have to rely on to act before we are able to reason.

The exposition to the ninth principle, 'That certain features of the countenance, sounds of the voice, and gestures of the body, indicate certain thoughts and dispositions of the mind' (EIP 484), even goes a step further. Reid claims that thoughts and mental dispositions are invisible, and therefore, that there is no moment in time when we are able to observe sign and thing signified together. This in turn means that we can't learn by experience what gesture stands for what disposition. Accordingly, Reid reasons that 'there must be some earlier source of this knowledge', meaning a source prior to experience (EIP 486).

> Nature seems to have given to men a faculty or sense, by which this connection is perceived. And the operation of this sense is very analogous to that of the external senses. (EIP 486)

If the operation of this sense is analogous to that of the external senses, so is the involvement of the faculty of judgement in its operations. The item on the list states which 'innate program' determines the extent in which judgement is involved. We believe, upon perceiving certain bodily gestures, certain sounding voices etc. that the subject we ascribe these gestures and voices to is in a certain state of mind. For example, depending on how the voice sounds and appears to us, we believe the subject to be in anger, fear or excitement. The best way to capture this, is to say that what we have here is one psychological principle that brings about many particular beliefs. These, in turn, are self-evident, immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary. In other, remoter, contexts, Reid refers to these beliefs as 'first principles', because we are forced to hold them true and to begin all inquiry on their basis.

The seventh principle is one of the most popular principles among contemporary scholars. Lehrer, to give just one example, calls it the 'first first principle' and occasionally claims its content to be that 'the first principles are true'.[30] We will deal with Lehrer's interpretation later, but when Reid

[30]This is reported by Van Cleve (2015: 360), who records that Lehrer claimed, in a

tells us about the seventh first principle, it actually says 'That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious' (EIP 480). In discussing the seventh principle, Reid refers to the principle as a truth. In the first part of a segment that is heavily cited by many proponents of the epistemic reading, Reid tells us the following:

> 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. (EIP 481)

Every judgement presupposes that we believe we are not being deceived.[31] Indeed, when we think we are deceived, we wouldn't form a judgement about whatever it is we think we are deceived about. We might, of course, still form a second-order judgement about our deception and how things appear to us.

Immediately afterwards, Reid asks how we come to be assured of this 'fundamental truth on which all others rest' (ibid.). It is important to understand that Reid is not asking rhetorically, because, as we have learned in chapter 3.4 on evidence, Reid assigns the property of self-evidence more on the ground that the production of such beliefs is 'hidden in impenetrable darkness', than because we believe them immediately upon understanding them. The latter is true of axioms, to which Reid compares, for example, perceptual beliefs. The evidence of perceptual beliefs is similar to that of axioms, and Reid goes on to call perceptual beliefs self-evident. But that is a result of the similarity in outcome, not because the process of their production is the same. That said, it is still true that we immediately believe that our faculties are not fallacious upon understanding it, but I think Reid wants to say that this step is already too much. We implicitly believe it even before we understand the sentence making this statement, and we can't say

seminar on Reid, that the seventh principle says that all principles are trustworthy, with being trustworthy implying both being true and being evident.

[31] But if beliefs result from judgements, this would invite an infinite regress. Our belief that we are not being deceived itself would require a belief that we are not deceived, etc. We could weaken the notion of belief, or switch to talk about trust. What Reid intends to say here, is that we are constituted such that we implicitly trust our faculties. *That* is a claim not threatened by an infinite regress.

why. Therefore, their self-evidence is to be understood as a stopgap that Reid employs because the actual processes of their production are hidden from us and because of the similarity that this production has with beliefs in axioms. This also explains, why, instead of simply citing their self-evidence as a reply, Reid ventures a little further still:

> Perhaps evidence, as in many other respects it resembles light, so in this also, that as light, which is the discoverer of all visible objects, discovers itself at the same time; so evidence, which is the voucher for all truth, vouches for itself at the same time. (EIP 481)

The fact that this paragraph starts with 'Perhaps', whereas the immediately following paragraph begins with 'This, however, is certain' suggests that Reid, against his general sentiment, is in the business of speculation here. Whereas some, especially Lehrer, put incredible amounts of weight on this passage, we should prefer, as what Reid really wants himself to be committed to, the ensuing paragraph. It falls back on what was already established in the chapter on evidence.

> This, however, is certain, that such is the constitution of the human mind, that evidence discerned by us, forces a corresponding degree of assent. [...] We are born under a necessity of trusting to our reasoning and judging powers; and a real belief of their being fallacious cannot be maintained for any considerable time by the greatest Sceptic, because it is doing violence to our constitution. (ibid.)

Here, at least, Reid is back to talking about our constitution, and that it is a part of our constitution that we take our faculties to be not fallacious. The omitted passage is where he mentions the monster, which we have already covered in 3.4.

Reid ends the discussion of the seventh principle with noting 'that in most men it produces its effects without ever being attended to, or made an object of thought' (EIP 482). Continuing in the same vein, he says it governs our opinions and that when we trust our faculties, it presupposes an inward conviction that we are not deceived in that instance. Not, note, that we *de facto* are not deceived.

The discussion of the sixth principle, 'That we have some degree of power over our actions and the determinations of our will' (EIP 478), is ambiguous between the two conceptions. Throughout the associated exposition Reid is only concerned to establish that we have an idea of power and a conviction that we have some degree of power in ourselves (EIP 479). Upon reaching the final paragraphs of the exposition, he comes back to speaking about the origin of this conviction.

> It is not more evident that mankind have a conviction of the existence of a material world, than that they have the conviction of some degree of power in themselves, and in others; every one over his own actions, and the determinations of his will: A conviction so early, so general, and so interwoven with the whole of human conduct, that it must be the natural effect of our constitution, and intended by the Author of our being to guide our actions.
>
> It resembles our conviction of the existence of a material world in this respect also, that even those who reject it in speculation, find themselves under a necessity of being governed by it in their practice; and thus it will always happen when philosophy contradicts first principles. (EIP 480)

I find the passage to be ambiguous between the two notions. We can put weight upon the fact that Reid takes first principles to be things that we can reject in speculation and that can contradict philosophy, suggesting a propositional form, but we can likewise emphasize that we are governed by first principles in our practice, and that there are senses in which I can contradict and reject things that are no propositions. I take it that such passages are neutral. They don't contradict my proposal (of principles as principles of belief), but I can't base my interpretation on them. They fit, just as they would fit the view that principles are beliefs.

Lastly, the first of the first principles, 'the existence of every thing of which I am conscious' (EIP 470). Reid explains:

> When a man is conscious of pain, he is certain of its existence; when he is conscious that he doubts, or believes, he is certain of the existence of those operations.

> But the irresistible conviction he has of the reality of those operations is not the effect of reasoning; it is immediate and intuitive. The existence therefore of those passions and operations of our minds, of which we are conscious, is a first principle, which Nature requires us to believe upon her authority. (EIP 470)

Although not promising in the long run, we could take this as evidence that Reid treats this as a metaphysical principle. Its formulation diverges from Reid's usual treatment in that this takes 'the existence of X' as a first principle, whereas most of the others come in the form of a that-clause.

Taking the first principle to differ in this respect from the others is a long-shot, because the expositions include a short discussion of the proponents of the way of ideas, noting that even they acknowledged, 'that this at least is an original power of the mind; a power by which we not only have ideas, but original judgements, and the knowledge of real existence' (EIP 471). A power of the mind is different from a truth about the existence of mental entities. Reid proclaims the former, that we are furnished with the power of consciousness, rather than making an ontological claim about what actually happens in our minds.

Additionally, he ends the exposition with the following passage:

> As therefore the real existence of our thoughts, and of all the operations and feelings of our own minds, is believed by all men; as we find ourselves incapable of doubting it, and as incapable of offering any proof of it, it may justly be considered as a first principle, or dictate of common sense. (EIP 471)

The existence of X is nothing that can't be believed. Thus, Reid hints at the way the first principle would be properly formulated, namely *That our thoughts, operations and feelings of our mind, really exist.*

4.3.2 Principles as Beliefs

Other expositions seem to favour the view that the principles *are* beliefs. Although this wouldn't threaten my interpretation of Reid as a descriptive psychologist, I think it makes more sense that the principles are that which effects beliefs. So how are we to deal with the textual evidence? One big advantage of the view of principles as principles of belief over the view that

principles are beliefs is that the former can better explain the evidence for the latter, whereas there is not much room for the latter to explain why sometimes Reid conceives of principles as origins of belief.

One example of an exposition that lacks evidence that Reid understands the principles as principles of belief, but includes evidence that he understands them as beliefs, is the exposition linked to the eighth principle, 'That there is life and intelligence in our fellow-men with whom we converse' (EIP 482).

First, note that on its metaphysical reading, it states that our fellow humans are alive and conscious. On the reading that I propose, it states that we believe that our fellow humans are alive and conscious - either because there is a principle which suggests these beliefs to us, or because the principle is that belief. If we take a look at the exposition added to the principle, nothing Reid says motivates, makes plausible, or is otherwise related to what the principle would be saying on the metaphysical reading. Instead, Reid refers to it as a 'natural conviction', and culminates in telling us that 'This knowledge, therefore, must be antecedent to reasoning, and therefore must be a first principle' (EIP 483). As to the occurrence of 'knowledge', Reid has told us earlier in the sixth essay, that he uses 'knowledge' and 'judgement' interchangeably: 'whether these determinations ought to be called *knowledge* or *judgement*, is of small moment' (EIP 411).

Whether it be judgement or knowledge, the relevant mental state is a belief, and therefore he makes a claim about what we believe, rather than the metaphysical claim. Having said that, it is of course interesting whether he goes so far as claiming that the principle always suggests true belief, but someone who uses 'knowledge' and 'judgement' interchangeably either has a notion of judgement incompatible with ordinary language, or treats knowledge more along the lines of certainty than of justified true belief.

Reid not only switches back and forth between knowledge and conviction, he also calls the principles truths. If there are convictions that are so basic and fundamental, and if we believe them, as Reid thought, necessarily, immediately, and irresistibly, then to sometimes slip and call these beliefs 'truths' is understandable. Everyone, in Reid's view, holds them to be true.[32] His readers will understand him no less when he switches back

[32]It is established in 3.2, i.e., that certain beliefs are immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary.

and forth between 'conviction' and 'truth'. The difference is important only to us. But therein also lies another feature that the descriptive psychological reading can better explain. Because according to it, Reid is not concerned with epistemology (or metaphysics, for that matter), he is only concerned with a description of the mind. There, switching back and forth between truth and conviction is less damaging than when his project would be to lay the epistemic foundation for all of us. If we were worrying about an epistemic foundation, mere convictions presumably couldn't carry all the rest, but truths could. This is another instance where it is simply assumed that if he says 'conviction', he always means 'truth', although the evidence is divided roughly even. With regard to this issue, we find an unlikely ally in Descartes.

> What is it to us that someone may make out that the perception whose truth we are so firmly convinced of may appear false to God or an angel, so that it is absolutely speaking false. Why should this 'absolute falsity' bother us, since we neither believe in it, nor have even the smallest suspicion of it? For the supposition which we are making here is of a conviction so firm that it is quite incapable of being destroyed; and such a conviction is clearly the same as the most perfect certainty. (CSM II: 103)

Reid's answer would be that it is precisely nothing to us, if our invincible beliefs, shared across the vast majority of humankind, were absolutely speaking false. Hence, it is acceptable to refer to such invincible beliefs as truths. Now, if Descartes thought this, why shouldn't Reid have thought along the same lines, given that he switches back and forth between truth-talk and belief-talk.

Note also that at this point, there is not much reason to differentiate between truth and belief, especially so if Reid wants to speak with the vulgar. The beliefs in question are psychologically necessary, immediate and irresistible. They are self-evident. Any argument against them will fail to convince us. That is, we can't treat them any different than known truths. The practical difference shrinks so much that it is only on a theoretical level that we can still distinguish them. And by that I mean something that is consistent with it being hardly comprehensible that these beliefs wouldn't be true. I can piece together the propositions (i) that we have these beliefs

and (ii) that the world is wholly different, but I can't understand it like I understand that sometimes our beliefs fail to be true. The latter is a feeling everyone is familiar with. But the idea that all our beliefs are mistaken is simply idle, in the sense that, no matter what, we won't believe it and we won't act according to it. It isn't even clear what it would mean to act according to it. Sure, some brand of sceptics claims that *our world* is a model how acting according to it would look like, for they think that all our beliefs are mistaken, but that answer misses the point (i.e., that we can't ever believe with the sceptics, that all our beliefs are mistaken).[33]

Corresponding to the back and forth between truth and belief is the talk of 'p' and 'the belief that p'. For example, in the opening chapter of the essay, Reid gives a formulation of the fifth principle which differs from the one on the list only in that, this time, he specifies that *we believe* the objects of perception to exist, and exist like we distinctly perceived them. Speaking about the role of judgement in most of our operations, thus making plausible why the list of first principles appears to be heterogeneous, he continues by mentioning that he restricts his claim to 'persons come to the years of understanding' (EIP 409). With regard to these, Reid says:

> In them it is evident, that a man who feels pain, judges and believes that he is really pained. The man who perceives an object, believes that it exists, and is what he distinctly perceives it to be; nor is it in his power to avoid such judgement. And the like may be said of memory, and of consciousness. (EIP 409)

Just as it is plausible that Reid is less concerned than we are to always carefully differentiate between a conviction and a truth, he seems less concerned to differentiate between a belief and a statement of fact when he comes to speak of matters where there is no other option than to believe, that is, hold true, certain things. Given that Reid switches back and forth, there is first the question why we should take the truth/fact-passages as reason to reinterpret those where he talks about beliefs and convictions, and in this sense, this work shows how the alternative might look like. There is secondly the

[33] Reid defends that the impossible is conceivable, because we couldn't employ inferences like *reductio ad absurdum*. I take it to be consistent that we can conceive things, which would be hardly comprehensible if it were actually the case. For example, we can conceive, according to Reid, that the world doesn't exist. But, at the same time, Reid can hold that we wouldn't understand it if our world would not exist, because we necessarily believe it to exist, irresistibly and immediately.

point that it is fatal for his alleged epistemological project to be so loose, whereas it is no problem within the project of descriptive psychology.

Of the twelve available expositions, five haven't contained any relevant information for either my opponents' interpretation or mine. Only the exposition to the eighth principle has consistently referred to principles as beliefs. The others have either exclusively referred to principles as what effects belief, or have contained references to the principles as beliefs as well as what effects belief. I have also shown that the interpretation that principles are what effects belief can explain the whole evidence better than competing interpretations.

We have now discussed the principles in isolation and in the context of their accompanying expositions. Taking the further context into consideration, as will be done in 4.4, will show that Reid employs the term 'first principle' for fundamental beliefs, axioms and first truths, as well as that entity by means of which the faculty of judgement yields beliefs, including those that are fundamental, axioms or first truths. For example, the chapter *Of first principles in general* almost exclusively employs the former meaning, while the list of necessary truths conforms better to the latter meaning. Lastly, I show that Reid employs 'principle' in the sense of a source of belief in both the EAP and the IHM.

In general, we can say that the evidence for either view, principles as principles of belief, or principles as beliefs, is less forthcoming than in the chapter dealing with the list of contingent principles. However, as we will see below, evidence for an answer to the broader question whether Reid's philosophy amounts to descriptive psychology or normative epistemology increases. Now, we conclude the findings we already have, since, as I said before, I value the evidence from within the discussion of his principles higher than evidence from chapters farther away (regarding the question: what are the first principles from his list?).

4.3.3 Principles or Beliefs?

Are Reid's first principles *principles* or *beliefs*? If you side with the former, the resulting picture is this. Every mind has a constitution. In Reid's view, this is God's workmanship, but nothing hinges on this. Part of this constitution are faculties or powers, of which there are many. They are distinguished by their objects, or rather, the objects of their operations.

The faculty of memory is thus distinguished from the faculty of perception, because the former involves a conception of a past event, and a belief of its past existence, while the latter involves a conception of an object and the belief of its present existence. Both feature belief and conception as their parts, but because the mental states are of different (classes of) objects, they must be different faculties. Upon investigation of these beliefs and conceptions, Reid notices that there is uniformity: whenever a subject is confronted with certain inputs, the mind has certain beliefs. These are immediate (not the effect of reasoning) and irresistible (we can't throw them off) and psychologically necessary (we will have them, given the right input). So far, the picture involves the faculties and beliefs. But Reid notices that this doesn't capture the uniformity. Thus, there must be something else: principles, by means of which the faculty of judgement yields these beliefs (of which we have only this relative notion that they systematically produce certain beliefs). Because this is true of everyone, he calls that degree of the faculty of judgement involved in yielding these beliefs common sense. So common sense is a part of the faculty of judgement, and the first principles of common sense are principles by means of which that part brings about a certain class of beliefs, namely those that are immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary.

These beliefs are, for the most part, particular beliefs. They are self-evident (in Reid's sense of the term), and they are practically indispensable. We also have some of them very early on. Upon reaching a certain degree of understanding, we can also generalize and form the general belief corresponding to the first principles, such as 'If we distinctly perceive an object, we believe it to be really there, and we believe it to be like we have perceived it'. This, too, is self-evident. And we can use it to refer to the principle, a mental thing which is distinct from it.

Claiming that the principle is distinct from the general belief leaves intact most of the available textual evidence. Reid refers to the particular beliefs as first principles, and they are, in the sense of foundational beliefs, axioms and so on. They also bear the three associated properties of immediacy, irresistibility and psychological necessity. But Reid also refers to the items on his list as first principles. If we were to hold fixed that only particular beliefs can be first principles, we would have to ascribe to Reid the position that the things he refers to as first principles are not first principles, because

the items on the list are general. On the other hand, what Reid tells us about the first principles in the expositions is true about particular beliefs or their sources (their practical importance etc.), not about general beliefs. General beliefs would require reasoning to yield a particular belief,[34] but Reid is adamant about their help at guiding us at an age before we are able to reason. The other theme that Reid invokes at every occasion is their innateness, their being part of our constitution. But this is implausible both with regard to particular and general beliefs. These are not innate in the sense that we believe them continuously since birth. The beliefs are dispositional: We will have them upon receiving certain inputs, and *this* is innately so. We are pre-programmed to believe certain things upon certain inputs. Thus, innateness speaks in favour of principles as principles of belief. They also explain why the items on the list have a general formulation, and why he refers to particular beliefs as first principles occasionally, them being the result of the proper first principles and our only source of knowledge of their existence.[35]

Both views, first principles as beliefs or as principles of beliefs entail that first principles are mental entities, and it is this claim that is relevant for the following discussions. Most debates can be rephrased to fit either account, and the issue regarding whether Reid is an epistemologist or not remains the same. On the view of first principles as beliefs, are they justified? On the view of first principles as principles of belief, do they yield justified beliefs? My answer is that these are not Reid's questions and that he therefore doesn't answer them – he joins Wittgenstein in holding that there is something, Wittgenstein's hinge-propositions or Reid's first principles, with regard to which both affirmative and negative answers are misplaced.

[34] See Van Cleve (2015: 310), who takes this as an argument for his claim that the items on the list are not first principles, but statements about what first principles there are, as we have already discussed in 4.2.3.

[35] Among the remarks that Reid scatters throughout his works that deal with the topics of common sense and first principles, some do align neatly with the view of principles as principles of belief: 'When I hear a certain sound, I conclude immediately without reasoning, that a coach passes by. There are no premises from which this conclusion is inferred by any rules of logic. It is the effect of a principle of nature, common to us with the brutes' (IHM 50).

4.4 Further context

Let's take stock for a moment. Each of the EIP's essays, excluding the introduction, is dedicated to a faculty. The sixth essay deals with the faculty of judgement. It begins with a section on judgement in general, and follows that with a section on a particular part of judgement, which Reid refers to as 'common sense'. To further collect the ways in which that part of the faculty operates, Reid shifts to a general discussion of first principles, followed by a list of contingent first principles, and a list of necessary first principles. Lastly, there are sections on the opinions of his peers and other philosophers on the topics of judgement and first principles, and to close things off, a section that explains why some of our judgements turn out to be false.

What we have found out so far is that common sense is a faculty, because the chapter on common sense, the only there is in Reid's works, unanimously affirms that it is, and argued that principles are mental entities by means of which the faculty of judgement produces the beliefs it produces. So far, we have surveyed the principles from the list of contingent first principles on their own, and in connection with their accompanying expositions. The surrounding chapters, potential sources of further evidence, either consistently conceive of first principles as fundamental propositions, or switch back and forth between the two notions. What remains to be done, then, is, first, to widen our view to the chapters immediately succeeding and preceding, i.e., the list of necessary principles, and the discussion of first principles in general, and, secondly, to Reid's other major works, i.e., to the *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, and to the *Inquiry Into the Human Mind*, to show that Reid's usage of 'first principle' for principles of belief is not limited to the *Essays*.[36]

4.4.1 The List of Necessary Principles

As I already indicated above, there is a difference between Reid's general remarks about first principles and his remarks about the principles on his list. This difference extends to his discussion of the list of necessary principles,

[36] Although this dissertation is limited to the published works, there are remarks in the manuscripts that also employ 'first principle' for a principle of belief. At the very least, then, the manuscripts don't threaten the conclusions reached here. A more detailed account is given in footnote 45 of this chapter.

in that he almost completely drops the language of principles causing, effecting, producing or governing beliefs. Indeed, the first of them lack almost any discussion, so there isn't much to base any view on. Nothing he says would contradict that principles bring about beliefs, but the list of necessary principles lacks evidence on which to base my view. However, the fact that I can give a homogeneous account of both lists as principles understood as mental entities that bring about beliefs (or by means of which the faculty brings about belief) does count in favour of my view (against those that (have to) ignore the second list, or have to give a heterogeneous treatment in the absence of textual evidence).

Immediately after the first principles of contingent truths, Reid gives us the list of first principles of necessary truths. In line with my thesis, I will argue that they are principles of belief, albeit about matters considered, by us, to be necessary. Thus, the necessity involved is embedded in the beliefs produced by these principles (and likewise, the contingent principles are so called because they yield beliefs about matters we take to be contingent).

Besides the fact that it would be strange if Reid suddenly turned around and gave us a list of necessary truths instead of principles of belief, there is independent evidence that Reid considers this second list to comprise principles of belief as well. As opposed to the contingent list, this one only occasionally lists particular principles. Instead, it proceeds by subjects, namely Grammar, Logic, Mathematics, Taste, Morals and Metaphysics. Sometimes Reid states some examples, and with regard to Metaphysics, he discusses three particular principles in more detail.

There are no accompanying expositions for the principles of Logic and Grammar and the one linked to Mathematics only briefly rejects Hume's theory of mathematics on the grounds that we do have precise and determinate notions of mathematical objects. Therefore, there is not much material on which to base an interpretation. Reid refers to the principles as 'axioms' and indeed proceeds to list what many consider to be the axioms of those subjects, like *Tertium non Datur*, that any proposition is either true or false, and so on. Discussing Van Cleve's arguments against a generalist understanding of the principles revealed that, with regard to the items on the list of contingent truths, the items are generalizations of particular beliefs which are the result of the principles thus referred to.

It could be objected that in the fields of Logic, Mathematics and Gram-

mar, there could also be general beliefs produced by the principles. I don't find there to be any hard reasons why our view shouldn't be amended such that it allows for necessary general beliefs to be the direct result of our innate principles. It should be added that Reid distinguishes trifling propositions and axioms, noting that only the latter deserve the title of axiom because they are practically relevant, while the former are not. Where they are practically relevant, it is much more plausible that particular beliefs will precede the general belief.

In any case, we can pour oil on troubled water by noting that Reid combines the question of first principles of the sciences with our constitution:

> The first principles of all the sciences must be the immediate dictates of our natural faculties. (EAP 178)

Thus, we can't take the fact that Reid here appears to talk about first principles of the sciences as evidence for the claim that Reid considers these principles not as innate.

Starting with the principles of taste, Reid accompanies the remaining principles with expositions. For example, concluding the exposition on the principles of taste, Reid makes clear that he is concerned primarily with our constitution.

> The sum of what has been said upon this subject is, that, setting aside the tastes which men acquire by habit and fashion, there is a natural taste, which is partly animal, and partly rational. With regard to the first, all we can say is, that the Author of Nature, for wise reasons, has formed us so as to receive pleasure from the contemplation of certain objects, and disgust from others, before we are capable of perceiving any real excellence in one, or defect in the other. But that taste which we may call rational, is that part of our constitution by which we are made to receive pleasure from the contemplation of what we conceive to be excellent in its kind, the pleasure being annexed to this judgment, and regulated by it. This taste may be true or false, according as it is founded on true or false judgment. And if it may be true or false, it must have first principles. (EIP 494)

The object of the last sentence is 'this taste', meaning the rational taste which 'is part of our constitution'. Thus, that which must have first prin-

ciples is a part of our constitution, not an abstract subject and its likewise abstract axioms.

Both parts of our natural taste, the animal part and the rational part, are parts of our constitution. Whereas the former doesn't seem to involve judgment, and therefore, no belief, the latter involves both judgment and belief. These are produced, regulated and governed by the first principles of taste.[37]

The exposition to the moral principles is neutral to the question what principles are, but it contains an important clarification of the relationship between Reid's position and reductionism. In effect, Reid takes position against the idea that moral facts *are* facts about our constitution, that there are no objective truths in matters of taste or morals. Now although Reid is heavily engaged with facts about our constitution, these only answer the question of origin. The same facts about our constitution do nothing in settling the question of the truth of the beliefs so originated. That is, he thinks that there is an objective reality, both with regard to the material world and even to matters of taste and morals. My point is just that he never argues for such claims, just as he doesn't profess doubt with regard to them. What would be an impermissible attitude within epistemology is a healthy and promising attitude for a scientific project such as an anatomy of the mind or descriptive psychology.

In response to the attempt of reductionism, Reid answers:

> But I cannot help being of a contrary opinion, being persuaded that a man who determined that polite behaviour has great deformity, and that there is a great beauty in rudeness and ill breeding, would judge wrong whatever his feelings were.
>
> In like manner, I cannot help thinking, that a man who determined that there is more moral worth in cruelty, perfidy, and injustice, than in generosity, justice, prudence, and temperance, would judge wrong whatever his constitution was. (EIP 495)

But someone like that would still judge as a result of its, admittedly unusual

[37] Reid repeats here what he has laid out some paragraphs earlier in the exposition, stating that neither the merely animal, nor the acquired taste could be reduced to principles, 'but as far as it is founded on judgment, it certainly may' (EIP 493). In this context he also refers to the principles as 'dictates of our rational nature', which speaks in favour of the mental nature of principles, but coheres better with principles being beliefs.

or malfunctioning, principles. And we would find the judgements of such a person wrong, because *our* innate moral principles yield beliefs about what is good or bad regardless of anyone's constitution.[38] Evidence for the epistemologist interpretation would be Reid's missing demand that he ought to change his beliefs in accordance to Reid's principles.

Lastly, Reid discusses three metaphysical principles, each of which he takes to be attacked by Hume.

> 1. That the qualities which we perceive by our senses must have a subject, which we call body, and that the thoughts we are conscious of must have a subject, which we call mind. (EIP 495)
>
> 2. That whatever begins to exist, must have a cause which produced it. (EIP 497)
>
> 3. That design, and intelligence in the cause, may be inferred, with certainty, from marks or signs of it in the effect. (EIP 503)

Before we take a look at their expositions, let us briefly take the position of someone who thinks that these are necessary principles, not principles of beliefs about necessary matters. If not anywhere else on this list, here should be the place to mention what Reid most certainly considered as the first truth of everything: God. God's absence from the list should strike us immediately. We know that Reid was a religious man and that he invokes God on numerous occasions throughout his works. Surely God is the first cause, the reason why everything else exists, just as the fact that he exists and has created the world grounds all other truths. How is his existence not *the* axiom for everything else? Well, it is, but this is not the list of ultimate truths, it is the list of principles of beliefs about necessary matters.

With regard to the exposition of the first of these metaphysical principles, Reid highlights facts that all point towards, or presuppose, that the principles are mental. For example, the fact that the distinctions between thought and thinker, figure and thing figured or motion without something that is moved (EIP 495), are found in the structure of all languages (EIP

[38] I anticipate the temptation to take this to show that there is normativity, but, as I argue below, among his first principles of morals is that blame is justified only where there was choice. Indeed, said principle is just paragraphs before this, suggesting that we understand the former in light of the latter. There is a difference between being forced to think someone who thought that rudeness is beautiful is wrong, and that it is objectively true that he should think differently.

496). This is good evidence to claim that such a belief is universal, which, in turn, is good evidence to think that such belief results from our constitution, but neither is a reason to think that the belief must be true.

It also features instances of the *apraxia* 'objection', or rather, Reid proclaims that sceptics and anti-realists can't 'talk on the common affairs of life for half an hour, without saying things that imply [their] belief of the reality of these distinctions' (EIP 496).[39] The situation isn't that there are anti-realists and sceptics who are wrong, it is that, they, too, are governed by the principles of our constitution, as their deeds reveal. So here, too, is the focus on what even the staunchest proponents of scepticism *believe*, not whether their theory is true or false. We'll discuss Reid's approach to scepticism and its meaning for Reid's work in chapter 5.1.

Shortly before ending the first exposition, Reid again states his opinion that we have beliefs and notions not from experience, but as a result of our constitution.

> A due attention to these two opinions [i.e., that sensible qualities require bodies, that thought requires mind] which govern the belief of all men, even of Sceptics in the practice of life, would probably have led him [i.e., Locke] to perceive, that sensation and consciousness are not the only two sources of human knowledge; and that there are principles of belief in human nature, of which we can give no account but that they necessarily result from the constitution of our faculties; and that if it were in our power to throw off their influence upon our practice and conduct, we could neither speak nor act like reasonable men. (EIP 497)

My argument, here and elsewhere, is not that such passages *unmistakably* show that Reid is only concerned about the mental realm, not with questions of justification and truth. It is that in speaking about his principles, this is all there is. All Reid gives us are remarks as the one above.

Closing the exposition to the first metaphysical principle, Reid refers back to some of the contingent principles, that we believe what we are conscious of, that we trust our faculties, that we believe our sensations to be real, and condemns the attempt to adhere to the principles only where we have reason to do so. 'We say, it must be so, it cannot be otherwise' (EIP

[39] Reid's *apraxia* arguments are discussed at 5.1.2.

497) – I take this to express our belief that the principles yield true beliefs, that we are not forced to rely on fallacious principles etc. This, according to Reid, 'expresses only a strong belief, which is indeed the voice of Nature, and which therefore in vain we attempt to resist.' Finally, Reid issues a warning to his readers that we should be contempt with this belief.[40]

> But if, in spite of Nature, we resolve to go deeper, and not to trust our faculties, without a reason to shew that they cannot be fallacious, I am afraid, that seeking to become wise, and to be as gods, we shall become foolish, and being unsatisfied with the lot of humanity, we shall throw off common sense. (EIP 497)

This implies that we have to trust, without a reason to think they are not fallacious, and that the attempt to supply a reason is doomed. 'Have to trust' in the sense of a psychological necessity, not as an epistemic norm. If we were to think that this shows that it is possible to throw off common sense, we would be likewise committed to regard our being as gods possible. Because Reid thinks we are infinitely removed from being gods, it is likewise impossible to throw off common sense.

Upon discussing the second metaphysical principle – 'That whatever begins to exist, must have a cause which produced it' (EIP 497) –, Reid frames the arguments he has given before as a trilemma: the principle is either an opinion, for which we have no evidence, or we can directly prove it by argument, or it is self-evident (ibid.) – all of which speaks in favour of it being mental, and it being a belief.

Reid rejects the first on the basis of it leading to the end of philosophy, science, religion, prudence and all reasoning beyond the immediate objects of sense (ibid.). More properly, it would be the resultant rejection of the principle that would lead to all these dire consequences. Reid assumes that it is no option to continue to rely on this principle should it turn out that we had no evidence to take up this belief, a thing hardly plausible on Reid's account of evidence. We can't just believe what we are in the mood to believe. We don't need to take Reid that seriously, though, because he is of course of the opinion that it is self-evident, and that is reason enough to reject the first option.

[40] And, in passing, note the similarity between this warning and Wittgenstein's comment that it is so hard to begin at the beginning (OC 471).

Reid rejects the second option, because neither abstract nor empirical reasoning would lead to the adoption of said belief.[41] Hume is supposed to have shown that the abstract arguments are question-begging, meaning that believing the proposition to be proved was required in order that the conclusion follows. The empirical arguments are likewise not suited to account for the principle, for three reasons. First, the principle is necessary, and as such, incapable of an inductive proof.[42] Secondly, laws and generalizations grounded on experience allow for exceptions, whereas necessary laws don't. Because we don't treat the principle as allowing exceptions – we don't think that sometimes, there could be something that has no cause – this, too, is a reason against an empirical argument. Lastly, Reid mentions that we don't regularly perceive causes. That is, our experience of the world is not that every effect has a cause, 'and therefore, from experience, we cannot know whether they have a cause or not. Causation is not an object of sense' (EIP 499).

This leaves us with the third option, to accept that the principle is self-evident. Here, too, Reid offers us reasons, namely 'the universal consent of mankind' (EIP 499) and 'that the practice of life is grounded upon it in the most important matters, even in cases where experience leaves us doubtful' (EIP 501).

As noted above, these are perfectly good arguments for the claim that they are innately believed, or, more plausibly, the product of innate principles of belief. Indeed, Reid refers to the second principle as a 'universal belief' (EIP 501). In support of these two reasons, Reid produces a number of humorous examples that show that, in practice, we always believe there to be a cause, even when no cause can be found. These examples would terribly miss their mark if Reid were concerned about the truth of the principle.

> A child knows that when his top, or any of his playthings are

[41] That Reid is concerned with arguments as sources for belief, not truth, becomes more visible in his discussion of the third principle, where he clarifies that he doesn't object to the argument, 'but the conclusion drawn from it has been held by all men from the beginning of the world. It cannot, therefore, be thought that men have been led to this conclusion by that reasoning' (EIP 507).

[42] This has to be contextualized and read with charity. What Reid means is to say that there is nothing we can observe that would show us the necessary connection between cause and effect. Of course it is still true that I can reason from empirical premises to necessary conclusions, depending on the rules governing the introduction of the necessity-operator. From any perception of p, I might reason that necessarily, p or $\neg p$. Obviously, this is not what Reid has in mind.

> taken away, it must be done by somebody. Perhaps it would not be difficult to persuade him that it was done by some invisible being, but that it should be done by nobody he cannot believe. (EIP 501-2)

Reid's second example features a jury which, before taking on the question of whether it was murder or suicide, takes on the question of whether there was a cause or no cause to the event of deceasing (ibid.). Neither of these examples would be acceptable, if Reid were concerned with showing that the principles are true. But they are acceptable at showing how universal and necessary such beliefs are to mankind. Thus, I take it that the latter is the only (current) concern of Reid.

The last metaphysical principle follows the same thread. Reid mentions that

> it is no less a part of the human constitution, to judge of mens characters, and of their intellectual powers, from the signs of them in their actions and discourse, than to judge of corporeal objects by our senses: That such judgments are common to the whole human race that are endowed with understanding; and that they are absolutely necessary in the conduct of life. (EIP 504)

That is, Reid makes a claim of innateness, of universal belief and of practical necessity. Because it is so universal and believed before other sources are available to us, he takes it to be innate. He echoes that empirical arguments couldn't establish such a belief, and adds that many of our inferences from sign to things signified are innate, because we have never experienced the sign and thing signified in conjunction.

Concluding, Reid remarks:

> Thus I think it appears, that the principle we have been considering, to wit, that from certain signs or indications in the effect, we may infer, that there must have been intelligence, wisdom, or other intellectual or moral qualities in the cause, is a principle which we get, neither by reasoning nor by experience; and therefore, if it be a true principle, it must be a first principle. (EIP 508)

Lastly, Reid ventures into the meaning this principle has for religious reasoning and proving God's existence. The difference between this principle, which forms a premise in the argument for God's existence and one affirming God's existence on its own is that, the former is an innate principle of beliefs, which is the reason why it is on the list, while the latter is not a principle of beliefs, and therefore, it is not on the list, although Reid takes it to be *the* fundamental first truth.

Therefore, it is highly implausible that the list is a list of metaphysical principles, both because Reid refers to them as innate convictions and beliefs, and because it lacks an item which is, in Reid's eyes, the most important metaphysical truth. But more often than not, Reid did employ the term 'first principle' for a belief, rather than that which effects these beliefs. However, I have argued that the innateness of beliefs is best spelled out as an innateness of a principle which yields these beliefs upon the right input, and there is no part of this chapter that resists interpreting Reid as thinking that there are underlying principles that yield the beliefs he here refers to by the term 'first principle'. This would allow for a homogeneous treatment of both lists, which is much preferred to having to consider these to be heterogeneous, for Reid certainly treats them homogeneous. The remaining remarks of Reid in this chapter, as to the principle's indispensability in practice, their universality, that we couldn't derive them from observations, that they are prior to reason, all point towards a descriptive endeavour. They are reasons to think that these are really believed. They are not reasons to think that they are true, evident or justified.

4.4.2 Marks of First Principles

The list of necessary principles immediately succeeds the list of contingent principles. Immediately preceding is another relevant chapter, *Of first principles in general*, which features a discussion of the marks of first principles, and ways to argue about them. In his discussion, Reid almost exclusively refers to principles as propositions, suggesting that Reid, at this point in time, takes first principles to be fundamental beliefs. Just as self-evidence is a property of something propositional, the other properties that Reid links to first principles require them to be propositional, such as their place in chains of reasoning.

In effect, Reid proposes five theses with regard to first principles, the

fourth of which contains their marks:

> 1. That all knowledge got by reasoning must be built upon first principles. (EIP 454)
>
> 2. That some first principles yield conclusions that are certain, others such as are probable, in various degrees, from the highest to the lowest. (EIP 455)
>
> 3. That it would contribute greatly to the stability of human knowledge, and consequently to the improvement of it, if the first principles upon which the various parts of it are grounded were pointed out and ascertained. (EIP 457)
>
> 4. That Nature hath not left us destitute of means whereby the candid and honest part of mankind may be brought to unanimity when they happen to differ about first principles. (EIP 459)
>
> 5. [That] when an opinion is so necessary in the conduct of life, that without the belief of it, a man must be led into a thousand absurdities in practice, such an opinion, when we can give no other reason for it, may safely be taken for a first principle. (EIP 467)

The fourth of these is more like the headline for six ways Reid proposes that one can still argue about them, despite them being fundamental. We'll discuss them just below.

Although one could attempt to argue that the second of these has principles yielding conclusions, and that, maybe, we could understand parts of our knowledge being grounded upon first principles in line with the notion of first principles as principles of belief, it is clear from the text that Reid here uses 'first principle' to refer to beliefs, not their source. I have already discussed ways in which to incorporate this into my interpretation, the fact that 'first principle' is ambiguous between a fundamental belief and a source of belief (among other things), that we know the principles only by their effects, and thus, that we are tempted to confute them at times, and more comfortable talking about their effects, of which we have direct knowledge, rather than their source, of which we only have a relative notion of.

That there is a slight disconnect between this chapter on first principles in general, and the lists of principles, can be seen by how much more principles are demarcated by the marks than are on the list. To take but one

example, why isn't the existence of the material world on the list? It surely has all the marks of a first principle, it would be philosophically relevant in that it would directly entail the falsity of Berkeley's idealism, but it doesn't make the cut. Why doesn't it make the cut? It seems, then, that there is a thematic difference between the list of first principles and this chapter.

Another noteworthy point is that Reid, except for the occasional reference to a first principle as true (and we have discussed why this isn't a big issue for us), the marks entail neither truth nor justification. For example, in discussing the first mark, Reid argues that for every proposition, it is either self-evident or evident. If it is evident, then there is some proposition from which its evidence derives, until we reach a proposition that is self-evident. However, we have seen that, while it makes sense to refer to self-evident propositions as true, because everyone takes them to be, Reid's notion of self-evidence does not entail truth. His reasoning with regard to the first mark can be encapsulated in the following remark: 'without first principles, analytical reasoning could have no end, and synthetical reasoning could have no beginning' (EIP 455). It is true that we have to start somewhere, but this doesn't mean that our starting points, even if they are self-evident, are true.

One of the most referenced bits from this chapter are the marks of first principles.

> 1. In such controversies [about first principles], every man is a competent judge; and therefore it is difficult to impose upon mankind. (EIP 461)
>
> 2. That opinions which contradict first principles are distinguished from other errors by this; that they are not only false, but absurd: And, to discountenance absurdity, Nature hath given us a particular emotion, to wit, that of ridicule. (EIP 462)
>
> 3. There are certain ways of reasoning even about them, by which those that are just and solid may be confirmed, and those that are false may be detected. (EIP 463)
>
> 3a. It is a good argument *ad hominem*, if it can be shewn, that a first principle which a man rejects, stands upon the same footing with others which he admits: For, when this is the case, he must be guilty of an inconsistency who holds the one and rejects the

> other. (EIP 463)
>
> 3b. A first principle may admit of a proof *ad absurdum*. (EIP 463)
>
> 3c. That the consent of ages and nations, of the learned and unlearned, ought to have great authority with regard to first principles, where every man is a competent judge. (EIP 464)
>
> 4. 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. (EIP 467)

In this whole thread of remarks, Reid takes the principles to be beliefs or opinions. What distinguishes these from other beliefs is that they are believed universally, both with respect to time and place. And in line with that, they are also believed before we can reason, which points towards them being innate. We have captured these two features by saying that a certain class of beliefs is psychologically necessary, because they are the result of innate principles of belief. Reid thinks he can access these universal opinions by reflecting on 'the whole tenor of human conduct [...] and from the history of all ages and nations' (EIP 466). Additionally, the common structures in languages can reveal the beliefs of the relevant speakers (a fact which appeared in our discussion of his methods in chapter 2).

As to the arguments *ad hominem* and *ad absurdum*, it makes sense that their negation appears absurd, if they are universally believed and innate, and it might be a promising route to argue that propositions that have the same status should be treated the same. The difficulty will be to show that they have the same status, but that is Reid's problem.

All in all, the chapter coheres best with a notion of principles as beliefs, which are innate, universally believed, whose negation appears absurd to us and practically necessary in the conduct of our lives. Whereas my interpretation can account for all these properties, by distinguishing between the two notions of principle, the epistemic interpretations have a hard time with the absence of any link between the principles and their truth. Now we zoom out even further, to show that Reid's notion of principles of belief is continually present in all of his major works.

4.4.3 Principles of Action

We have seen the various meanings of 'principle' in early modern English, as well as, so far, at least three notions in Reid's works: the principle as a mind, a belief and the source of belief. In the *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, Reid likewise employs principle-talk, i.e., principles of action and principles of morals. Here, we take a look at what notion is at play there, and whether it might inform us about what Reid is doing in the EIP.

Whereas the principles of morals are understood along the lines of axioms of a science, propositions that immediately force our assent to them (i.e., self-evident as Reid understands it), the principles of action count among their ranks such things as instinct, habit and desire. That in itself should open up the interpretative space with regards to Reid's first principles. He distinguishes three kinds of principles of action, the mechanical, the animal and the rational. They are distinguished by what other faculties or powers they involve: The mechanical principles involve none, the animal principles involve will and intention, and the rational principles involve judgement or reason on top of it. Their key property is that they incite action.

> By principles of action, I understand every thing that incites us to act. If there were no incitements to action, active power would be given us in vain. Having no motive to direct our active exertions, the mind would, in all cases, be in a state of perfect indifference, to do this or that, or nothing at all. The active power would either not be exerted at all, or its exertions would be perfectly unmeaning and frivolous, neither wise nor foolish, neither good nor bad. (EAP 74)

If we take this as an indication of what principles are for Reid, or if we were to transfer what he says about principles of action to what he could mean with principles of belief, it would appear that, in one sense of the word, principles are things that bring about something. Actions in the case of principles of action, beliefs in the case of principles of belief. The above quote also confirms the metaphors we have employed so far, since it ascribes to principles the guiding of power. I find this greatly supports our talk of the faculties bringing about beliefs *by means of* the first principles.

While some habits, for example, are principles of action, not all habits

are, because they lack this feature of incitement to action.[43]

> Some habits produce only a facility of doing a thing, without any inclination to do it. All arts are habits of this kind; but they cannot be called principles. Other habits produce a proneness to do an action, without thought and intention. These we considered before as mechanical principles of action. (EAP 553)

Some of the principles of action are, like the principles of belief, innate and part of our nature, the most obvious being instinct. Others, like habit, are acquired.[44] But since our topic is limited to the first principles, we can set aside the possibility of acquired principles, for first principles are by definition not acquired.

Perhaps the greatest difference to principles of belief (and to the first principles of morals) is that many principles of action can be resisted. And because they can be resisted, Reid introduces normative notions into his discussion of principles of actions.

> We acquire, not only a facility, but a proneness to do on like occasions; so that it requires a particular will and effort to forbear it, but to do it, requires very often no will at all. (EAP 89)

Of course, not everything that can be resisted, should be resisted, and there is indeed a large class of principles whose deliverances are morally indifferent.

> From this we may observe, that the definition of virtuous actions, given by the ancient Stoics, and adopted by some modern authors, is imperfect. They defined virtuous actions to be such as are according to nature. What is done according to the animal part of our nature, which is common to us with the brute-animals, is in itself neither virtuous nor vicious, but perfectly indifferent. Then only it becomes vicious, when it is done in opposition to some principle of superior importance and authority.

[43] Another example is EAP 88: 'This definition is sufficient for habits of art; but the habits which may, with propriety, be called principles of action, must give more than a facility, they must give an inclination or impulse to do the action; and that, in many cases, habits have this force, cannot be doubted.'

[44] And of some principles there are acquired and natural ones, as is the case with desire, cf. EAP 104-105.

> And it may be virtuous, if done for some important or worthy end. (EAP 95)

> To act merely from appetite is neither good nor ill in a moral view. It is neither an object of praise nor of blame. No man claims any praise because he eats when he is hungry, or rests when he is weary. On the other hand, he is no object of blame, if he obeys the call of appetite when there is no reason to hinder him. In this, he acts agreeably to his nature. (EAP 94-95)

We'll discuss these, and more, in the next chapter (5.3).

In conclusion, Reid's discussion of the principles of action support the view of principles of belief set out in this chapter. Principles of action are like principles of belief in that many of them are natural, a part of our constitution, they share their role in bringing about something, and in guiding a power or faculty, the exertions of which depend upon the guiding role of the principles in place.

4.4.4 The *Inquiry into the Human Mind*

We have surveyed the chapters immediately pre- and succeeding the list, as well as the occurrence of the notion of principle employed in the monograph that succeeded the *Essays*. Now, what about Reid's debut, the twenty-years earlier published *Inquiry into the Human Mind*? Further supporting my case, we will find that even in this early work, Reid did employ a notion of principles as principles of belief, while also referring to particular beliefs as principles. At the very least, this shows that Reid's discussion of the first principles in his list of contingent first principles, and the notion of principle employed there, is no outlier. It is present throughout his published works.[45]

[45] Although I am not relying on the unpublished material, we find these two notions of principles even there. The most supportive remark of Reid, better than most of what I can produce with respect to the published material, is found in MSS, 2131/6/III/8,2r: 'yet every man is constrained to believe his memory when it gives a distinct Report. This <is> the more remarkable when we consider that our memory does sometimes deceive us. Nay in dreaming in fevers & frenzies it is altogether fallacious. Here then seems to be a third natural Principle like the two preceding Namely that what we distinctly remember to have happened when we are neither dreaming nor distempered must really have happened' (cited from the manuscripts reproduced in the *Edinburgh Edition* of the *Inquiry*, p. 321, see also p. 252 for the editorial principles which I have reproduced here). This passage is great, because it acknowledges (i) that everyone is forced to believe the distinct beliefs yielded by the faculty of memory, (ii) while we know that some of these

The most remarkable passage in this regard is section 24 of the chapter of seeing, only succeeded by the conclusion to the whole book. It is entitled *Of the analogy between perception, and the credit we give to human testimony*, and it compares perception and testimony as two of our main sources of knowledge. The broad parallel is this:

> In the testimony of nature given by the senses, as well as in human testimony given by language, things are signified to us by signs: and in one as well as the other, the mind, either by original principles, or by custom, passes from the sign to the conception of and belief of the thing signified. (IHM 190)

The mind passes from sign to belief *by means of* a first principle.

New to our discussion of principles is Reid's idea that there are particular and general principles (but not in the sense in which Van Cleve thinks there are). The passage also makes clear that Reid takes the principles to be innate, mental things.

> Our original perceptions, as well as the natural language of human features and gestures, must be resolved into particular principles of the human constitution. Thus, it is by one particular principle of our constitution, that certain features express anger [...] It is in like manner, by one particular principle of our constitution, that a certain sensation signifies hardness in the body which I handle. (IHM 191)

Whereas we have not heard from particular principles in the EIP, some of the general principles that Reid lists in the *Inquiry* are familiar from the list, like the principle of credulity or the inductive principle. Not on the list is the principle of veracity, to which Reid ascribes our tendency to speak truthfully.

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beliefs are false; and goes on from there to conclude that this must be a natural principle, which 'force our assent tho we cannot give a reason for them' (ibid.). Two paragraphs later, he follows up with a passage that highlights the fact that Reid considers principles to be things, not laws about things: 'Yet I apprehend it will be impossible to account for the Universality firmness and Earliness of this Belief unless we allow that by an Original Property of our Nature the Human Form & Features suggests a Human Mind without Reasoning or Reflexion' (IHM 322). Part of our constitution is a principle, an original property of our nature, that yields beliefs that our fellow human beings have minds, as soon as we are subjected to 'human form and features'. Thus, we can amend the sentence this footnote is attached to: It is not only present throughout his published work, but even in his unpublished manuscripts.

> If there were not a principle of veracity in the human mind, mens words would not be signs of their thoughts. (IHM 197)

The principle of credulity is a version of the (tenth) principle of testimony, responsible for our unlimited credulity as infants, to a more restricted, or informed, reliance on testimony in maturity. Lastly, the inductive principle:

> It is from the force of this principle, that we immediately assent to that axiom upon which all or knowledge of nature is built, That effects of the same kind must have the same cause. (IHM 198)

> Secondly, He hath implanted in human minds an original principle by which we believe and expect the continuance of the course of nature, and the continuance of those connections which we have observed in time past. (IHM 197)

None of this is new now, but it is interesting and supports my case that we find all the features required already in the *Inquiry*: Principles are things, innate, mental, implanted in our minds, that yield beliefs (and notions) upon receiving the right input (sensations, mostly).

4.4.5 Conclusion

We have dived deeply into the textual evidence available to answer the question of the nature of common sense. I have argued that the view of common sense as a faculty is the most coherent, for the simple reason that the only chapter that deals with common sense outright says so. Common sense being a faculty can also explain why Reid sometimes speaks of common sense as a set of beliefs, because there is a set of beliefs that the faculty produces.

The situation with first principles is less clear, but that was to be expected. There would not be that many conflicting interpretations just of that piece of Reid's philosophy if the texts were clear. We have identified two relevant notions of first principles, which render most of his principle-talk true. As with the case of common sense, they are related such that the one produces the other, which makes it at least understandable why Reid

switches back and forth between the two. Our prime principle of interpretation was coherence – to find a reading that makes as much true as possible, and to cause the least problems internally. What remains to be done is to integrate this view of the nature of common sense into Reid's philosophy, to understand its place and its role in what he wanted to achieve and to ask anew: What is Reid's philosophy?

But before that, there remains one nagging question. Isn't there evidence, and wouldn't it be much more in line with our interpretation to simply combine the two and say that first principles are the source of belief, and are beliefs themselves? They do all the things we say they do in claiming they are first principles of belief, and what Reid tells us about in those passages which suggest that principles are beliefs is also true. The faculty of judgement produces beliefs by means of beliefs.

By saying that the principles are particular beliefs, Reid wouldn't account for the principles' role as innate programs. We couldn't capture the systematicity of our beliefs by claiming they are the product of particular beliefs. It is also unclear how the particular beliefs would produce beliefs (by being signs, maybe, but again, we would lose the possibility of saying what mental entity accounts for the fact that one particular belief is the sign of another). Additionally, claims of innateness and universality make not much sense with regard to particular beliefs. That there is a tree now is neither innate, for I haven't believed it prior to my walk through the park, nor is it universal, because not everyone believes that there is a tree now (and rightly so).

By saying that the principles are general beliefs, we also run into the problem that they would have to exist prior to the formation of particular beliefs, but, in virtue of them being beliefs, we would have infants with general beliefs, beliefs even adults are hard pressed to be conscious of, much less to articulate clearly. Additionally, as Van Cleve (2015: 310) points out, they would yield the particular beliefs only in conjunction with yet other beliefs. My general belief, that whatever I perceive is really there, yields the particular belief, that there really is a tree, only if I also believe the antecedent, that I perceive a tree. However, this both violates Reid's claim of immediacy, and it also violates all those passages in which Reid claims that it is the perceptual statement that is the first principle (which we would understand in the sense of fundamental belief, not principle of belief).

So by squaring the fact that they are active without any consciousness on our part and that they are innate, I find it more plausible that they are not beliefs. Also, there is no independent evidence that Reid allows for beliefs to be productive of beliefs. The faculty and the principles do that, but beliefs don't have the property to suggest beliefs.

To bring this deep dive into the text to an end, let me briefly summarize where we are. One important claim was that Reid employs 'first principle' ambiguously – either for fundamental belief, axiom or first truth, or for principles *of* belief in the aforementioned sense. The discussion of the list of contingent principles, which we assigned the highest authority, contained mostly evidence for the claim that Reid's principles on that list are principles of belief, and in accordance with it, I claimed that the list *is* about principles of belief. Although the evidence was less numerous (for both sides), I would say the same about the list of necessary principles. The discussion situated in the chapter *Of first principles in general* seemed to be mostly concerned with principles in the sense of fundamental beliefs, axioms or first truths, and therefore, to be about something different than what the lists of principles are about. The connection, and the reason why it still makes sense to have these chapters in the essay on judgement, and in the order that Reid has given them, lies in the fact that these fundamental beliefs are the result of the principles from the lists. Lastly, I have shown that both the IHM and the EAP contain instances in which Reid clearly employs 'first principle' for innate, productive principles, whose role is to guide a power – active power in the case of the EAP, intellectual power in the case of the IHM.

Chapter 5

Reid's Descriptive Psychology

> The difficulty is to realize the groundlessness of our believing.
>
> Wittgenstein, On Certainty, 166

On grounds of our previous findings, I take it that those interpretations that hold the first principles and common sense to be non-mental are out of the race. In any case, they won't be considered in what follows. There are, however, those interpretations that ascribe to the principles a dual nature, as being descriptive *and* normative. It is this position that we will focus on in the following chapters, first considered in general, and afterwards as particular proposals by their most able proponents. With regard to the latter, I will attempt to supply error-theories. An interpretation so divergent from its fellow interpretations, like the one you're reading now, profits greatly if it can explain why, and how, others could reach so different conclusions about the same text.

Here, I will first argue for two obstacles that the epistemological interpretation would have to surmount, and afterwards explain how we can incorporate Reid's relationship with scepticism and the way of ideas into his descriptive psychology.

5.1 Two Obstacles for Normative Principles

The prime reason to conceive the principles as normative (alone, or on top of their descriptive nature) lies in their alleged anti-sceptical potential. The interpretative need for something anti-sceptical derives, I presume, from Reid telling us that the dangers of scepticism motivated his inquiry, as well as him opposing scepticism with common sense. The question is: Are we forced to spell out their anti-sceptical potential by interpreting them as being normative, or is there another way? In the following two sections, I will first give an argument to the effect that Reid couldn't understand the principles normatively, and secondly, argue that his opposition against scepticism doesn't give us a reason to interpret the first principles normatively. That is, there is neither a need for a normative understanding, nor is such an understanding possible for Reid.

5.1.1 Should We Believe What We Necessarily Believe?

As I have established in 3.2, and I hope other passages have equally expressed, the beliefs yielded by the first principles are immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary. As such, proponents of the epistemic reading are faced with the question whether Reid is working within a theory of norms according to which we can meaningfully apply norms irrespective of the fact that we can't break them and have no choice in following them.

Reid commits himself to a version of the principle of *ought implies can*, which is generally taken to say that we can only demand things from people that they are able to do (and therefore, able not to do), and in its reverse, that if someone can't do something, we can't demand it from him. In the same vein, a good deed might require that we had an alternative, just as no deed can be evil as long as it was necessary. Applied to beliefs, if we ought to believe a belief, we have to have the power to stop believing it, and if a belief is psychologically necessary and irresistible, then it is not the case that we ought to believe it – which isn't to say that we ought not to believe it. Rather, psychologically necessary and irresistible beliefs are normatively indifferent, which, as we have seen in 4.4.3, is a category Reid acknowledges.

Rather than discussing Reid's adherence to *ought implies can* through the lenses of the contemporary discussion,[1] we will simply skip to what Reid

[1] A major problem in the contemporary discussion of *ought implies can* lies in how the

actually tells us.

Under his first principles of necessary truths, he lists as a moral principle 'That no man ought to be blamed for what it was not in his power to hinder' (EIP 494). And when he takes up the topic again in the *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, his second and third items among the *First Principles of Morals* are: '2. What is in no degree voluntary, can neither deserve moral approbation nor blame. 3. What is done from unavoidable necessity may be agreeable or disagreeable, useful or hurtful, but cannot be the object either of blame or of moral approbation' (EAP 271). Finally, among the first sentences that open the EAP, Reid proclaims:

> Every thing virtuous and praise-worthy must lie in the right use of our power; every thing vicious and blameable in the abuse of it. What is not within the sphere of our power cannot be imputed to us either for blame or praise. These are self-evident truths, to which every unprejudiced mind yields an immediate and invincible assent. (EAP 5)

Importantly, Reid frames this in terms of what lies within our power.[2] Having the power to φ, I take it, implies the power not to φ. But don't take my word for it: 'Power to produce any effect, implies power not to produce it' (EAP 29).[3]

Now we have to determine whether we have power over our beliefs. How do we know what we have power over? Reid claims we know about our power from what is, and what is not, subject to our will.

> We grow from childhood to manhood, we digest our food, our blood circulates, our hearts and arteries beat, we are sometimes sick and sometimes in health; all these things must be done by

can-part of the principle is understood. If it is formalized as $\diamond A$, where $\diamond A \equiv \neg\Box\neg A$, it is still possible that $\Box A$. So where the contemporary discussion allows for necessary actions to be right (or some other normative term), because they are also possible (and because they understand the 'can' in 'ought implies can' by means of possibility), Reid, as we will see below, is clear in that necessary actions are exempt from moral evaluation.

[2]Further passages include EAP 38-39: 'Every thing laudable and praiseworthy in man, must consist in the proper exercise of that power which is given him by his Maker. [...] For, to call a person to account, to approve or disapprove of his conduct, who had no power to do good or ill, is absurd. No axiom of Euclid appears more evident than this.'

[3]With regard to the contemporary discussion, Reid would understand the can-part of the principle as the conjunction of $\diamond A$ and $\diamond\neg A$ – implying that 'ought' can't be applied to necessary things.

> the power of some agent; but they are not done by our power. How do we know this? Because they are not subject to our will. This is the infallible criterion by which we distinguish what is our doing from what is not; what is in our power from what is not. (EAP 31)

Finally, we must only answer the question whether the beliefs yielded by the first principles lie under the control of our will. We have already cited one passage in which Reid told us that it was not in his power to get rid of his belief in external objects (IHM 168), and I take it that the property of irresistibility that those beliefs yielded by the first principles exhibit, in general is meant to express that they are not subject to our will.[4]

Thus, with regard to the belief in the objects of sense, Reid holds that we 'may as soon, by reasoning, pull the moon out of her orbit, as destroy the belief of the objects of sense' (EIP 230). And from the *Inquiry* we can add the following:

> He may struggle hard to disbelieve the information of his senses, as a man does to swim against the torrent; but ah! it is in vain. It is in vain that he strains every nerve, and wrestles with nature, and with every object that strikes upon his senses. For, after all, when his strength is spent in the fruitless attempt, he will be carried down the torrent with the common herd of believers (IHM 169)

Lastly, both the EAP and EIP feature passages which confirm that belief and judgement are not subject to our will.

> A parent or master might command them to believe, but in vain, for belief is not in our power; but in the first part of life, it 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. (EAP 87)

[4] In his introduction to the *Inquiry*, editor Derek R. Brookes likewise explains that 'the operation of mind by which we form beliefs is largely involuntary and irresistible, much like breathing and swallowing' (IHM xiii). EIP 453 also compares swallowing to believing, albeit the point there is that both are 'purely natural, and therefore common to the learned and unlearned'.

> It is not in our power to judge as we will. The judgment is carried along necessarily by the evidence, real or seeming, which appears to us at the time. (EIP 452)

Beliefs, at least those yielded by the first principles, are not subject to our will, and therefore, we have no power over them. Therefore, such beliefs, and the judgements from which they arise, can't be the subject of praise, blame, approval, disapproval, moral approbation, being virtuous or being laudable.

This might be enough for some, but what if you were to resist and claim that these are only *moral* categories, while in epistemology we're interested in such properties as justification, warrant and the like. And while these epistemic properties might be normative or evaluative, you could claim that they are distinct from moral norms. And all we've seen so far is that, in the moral realm, Reid is committed to *ought implies can*.

I can't, not least for reasons of space, settle the matter that the epistemologist's 'you ought to believe that p' involves the same ought as the moralist's in 'you ought to ϕ'.[5] But allow me to share four reasons that might convince you, or else at least make it harder for you to uphold that what I have presented here is irrelevant for the prospect of Reid's epistemology.

First, in most of the quoted passages above, Reid is speaking about what lies in our power in general, and, with respect to those passages from the EAP, they even share the same context as some of those passages in which he tells us that belief lies not in our power. Although I drew from passages across his corpus to make my point, which shows that this sentiment was always there and didn't change, it is the EAP that features both the thesis that power over something is necessary for the application of normative notions and the thesis that belief lies not in our power.

You could object further by claiming that, although Reid seems to be very inclusive in saying that 'Everything virtuous and praiseworthy must lie in the right use of our power' (EAP 5), we have to understand it being implicitly limited to actions. I think it is *de facto* limited to actions because they are the things we have power over, but you would have to say that Reid implicitly, but in principle, limits moral evaluation to actions and therefore

[5] For a book-long argument that it is the same, see Cuneo's (2007) *The Normative Web*.

it is still open whether there are epistemic norms that can be meaningfully applied to irresistible and psychologically necessary beliefs.

One obstacle in such a division between actions and mental operations is that Reid, as we have seen in 3.1, conceives the mind as active and refers to mental operations as mental actions. And while our contemporary views work with very refined and neatly organised categories, this isn't the case for Reid. For example, one might be tempted to say that volition is necessary for action, but not for mental action, but Reid considers instincts to be principles of action, for example the instinct to close one's eyes when sneezing, and this clearly lacks volition, as well. Reid works with a tripartite distinction among the principles of action. The third kind is distinguished from the other two precisely by the fact that they involve the faculty of judgement and produce belief. Those without beliefs he calls mechanical principles, and those involving judgement and belief are the rational principles. Their effect is judgement, and in turn belief. That is, there are principles of action that yield belief. This mess makes it hard to explain the occurrence of normativity in the EAP by subject-matter. We have dealt with actions before, namely mental actions, and we are partly dealing with 'actions' now that involve neither judgement nor volition, and then we are dealing with principles of action that also bring about belief. The objection in question was based on the attempt to read 'Everything virtuous and praiseworthy' as really saying 'Every virtuous and praiseworthy action', based on the fact that the EAP deals solely with action, and the EIP does not. The problem is that the EAP does not deal solely with action, it features principles that yield beliefs as well, and that the EIP, insofar mental actions are actions, is also dealing with actions. Therefore, it is not convincing to claim that principles in the EAP are limited to actions simply because of where they are located within Reid's writing.

Lastly, there is no reason why the moral case shouldn't carry over to the epistemic case. If it is absurd to blame someone for something that wasn't in his power, then it is absurd to blame me for beliefs that I necessarily and irresistibly have. Reid closely links normativity to self-government, and we could explain the absence of the former with regard to the first principles by an absence of the latter. There is no self-government with regard to necessary and irresistible beliefs, and so there is no talk of normativity with regard to them.

What we have is a clear divide between principles that he considers to be irresistible, together with a glaring absence of normativity, and principles he considers to be subject to our power, together with a text that is suddenly intermingled with normative notions. On top of that, he also tells us that praise and blame, or vice and virtue are only applicable to things we have power over, and links such prescriptions to the concept of self-government, which likewise implies our power over something. Things we have no power over are neither praise- nor blameworthy, but indifferent. I take it that the most-straightforward interpretation, and the most coherent one, takes this at face-value. Normativity requires alternatives. Neither should we believe what we necessarily believe, nor should we not. The beliefs yielded by the first principles are indifferent with respect to normativity.

5.1.2 Four Problems for Reidian Anti-Scepticism

What should be done about the opposition between Reid and scepticism if we rob him of his only potent weapon – normative epistemic first principles? So far, we have interpreted Reid's list of first principles as descriptive, and rehearsed some reasons to think that the principles can't be normative on top of it. Now, we further reject the idea that Reid needs them to be normative, by shedding more light on his opposition to scepticism.

That an opposition to scepticism is no reason to impute any form of positive epistemic notions to someone can be easily grasped from Sextus' opposition to the academic sceptics (at least according to Sextus' version of that debate, cf. PH I, 226). Sextus' rejection of the dogmatic claim that we don't know anything is itself sceptical. Obviously, then, a much more careful look is required to see whether Reid's opposition to scepticism can be taken as a valid reason to interpret him as offering us an epistemology. I take the following four reasons to stand in the way of taking Reid to offer us an epistemology based on his relationship to scepticism.

1. Reid's usage of 'scepticism' is ambiguous.
2. According to Reid, there are no sceptics.
3. Reid holds that scepticism can't be refuted.
4. Reid's own 'scepticism'.

In the ensuing discussion, most passages that are available are relevant to more than one point. I have tried to pick the most poignant ones for each

thesis.

5.1.2.1 Ambiguity

Reid applies the label of scepticism to many different theories, or attitudes even, at least some of which are more properly described differently, as in the case of the way of ideas or other anti-realist theories. The result is that we have to tread carefully. What we take to be Reid's response to scepticism is dependent upon what he took scepticism to be. Even if we think his response involves common sense and the first principles, whether we should understand these notions as normative depends on whether their being normative would improve his position with regard to the sceptic, which, in turn, depends on what scepticism is in the first place.[6]

There are three sources to draw from in order to show that Reid refers to more than one position with the term 'scepticism': (i) there are philosophers that Reid views as sceptics, (ii) there are theories of philosophers (not necessarily sceptics themselves) that he considers to be sceptical, and (iii) Reid occasionally lets a fictional sceptic have his say, and disputes with him.

In all three cases, we will see that scepticism revolves around belief, not justification or knowledge. That is, it is either based on psychological premises, like the way of ideas (discussion of which is postponed to 5.2), or sceptics will attempt to suspend their judgement, or demand that someone else should suspend theirs. For example, he considers Pyrrho and Sextus to be proponents of scepticism and correctly describes their position as aiming for tranquillity by means of total suspension of belief.[7]

> That system, of which PYRRHO was reputed the father, [...] who taught men to believe nothing at all, and esteemed it the highest pitch of human wisdom to with-hold assent from every proposition whatsoever. (EIP 461)

[6]This should include responses to sceptical problems that are closed to the sceptic himself. Not every response to scepticism must be dialectically effective.

[7]Sadly, he misses the Pyrrhonian distinction between forced assent and belief, and therefore joins rank with those philosophers who think that the practices of Pyrrhonian Sceptics betray their claim to live without beliefs – launching time and again apraxia-arguments against this form of scepticism. Presumably not much to his liking, I have argued in Lang (2018) that the Pyrrhonian notion of forced assent is very close to Reid's own notion of belief, and there are other commonalities, such as their approach to theories, speculation and hypotheses. Indeed, Reid and Sextus both suspend judgement when it comes to what is allegedly *hidden* in reality.

> Thus Descartes brought himself into that very state of suspense, which the ancient Sceptics recommended as the highest perfection of a wise man, and the only road to tranquillity of mind. (EIP 514)

One notion of scepticism, then, is the ancient Pyrrhonian one of attempting to suspend all judgements in order to reach *ataraxia*. It is the same attempt, albeit means to a different end, that is prevalent in Descartes' *Meditations*, which Reid often uses as a point of reference as to what the sceptic is up to.[8] When Descartes, in the first meditation, specifies the project he is embarking on, it always has this psychological motif of suspending beliefs.

> I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely [...]. (CSM II: 12)
>
> [...] I will devote myself sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of my opinions. (ibid.)
>
> So, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions [...]. (ibid.)

Whereas Descartes thinks that entertaining the possibility of error (i.e., supposing that there is an evil demon) is enough to reach the aim of having no beliefs,[9] Sextus takes it to be a far more delicate matter, spending most of his *Outlines* presenting arguments for and against various topics. His work would've been much shorter had he thought the demon-hypothesis to be strong enough to reach suspension of belief in all cases.

Another difference between Descartes and the Pyrrhonians is that, for the latter, suspension of judgement is a means to the end of tranquillity, whereas in Descartes' case, it is a means to 'start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last' (CSM II: 12). Thus, we can see that in Descartes' case, his scepticism is based, in part, on the idea that there is a standard that beliefs should meet, or else be dropped. Descartes, in turn, suspends all judgements to start anew, but the stated reason that he wants to start

[8] Except where dialectically necessary, I will not distinguish between Descartes and the protagonist of the *Meditations*.

[9] As, for example, Schüssler (2013) points out, many think that Descartes is a doxastic voluntarist, that he believes that one can have voluntary control over one's beliefs. If this is true, it is another difference, because according to Sextus, beliefs come to us involuntarily, and we get rid of them by confronting ourselves with equally strong arguments from both sides (Reid, again, shares this view with Sextus, cf. EIP 557).

anew is that he hopes to attain a belief-system that is better than the former. Thus, to be a sceptic in the ancient Pyrrhonian sense is to live without beliefs. To be a sceptic in this Cartesian sense is to have certain standards for beliefs, which, when the belief's standards aren't met, have to be dropped (the beliefs, not the standards). For example, the sceptic might hold that we should only have those beliefs that are founded on reason, as Reid's imaginary sceptic does in the following passage:

> Reason, says the sceptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. (IHM 169)

The same sceptic, upon shifting the goal to circumvent Reid's objection, then holds that the chance that a belief is wrong is still reason enough to suspend judgement.

> There is nothing so shameful in a philosopher as to be deceived and deluded; and therefore you ought to resolve firmly to withhold assent, and to throw off this belief of external objects, which may be all delusion. (IHM 169)

Yet, the attack can come from the other end of the spectrum just the same, taking not reason, but observation to be the standard which can't be obtained.

> But, says the sceptical Philosopher, you can conclude nothing from these tokens, unless past experience has informed you that such tokens are always joined with understanding. [Reid's reply:] Alas! Sir, it is impossible I can ever have this experience. The understanding of another man is no immediate object of sight, or of any other faculty which God hath given me; and unless I can conclude its existence from tokens that are visible, I have no evidence that there is understanding in any man. (EIP 511-512)

Another source to draw from in order to understand Reid's notion(s) of scepticism is Hume, to whom he often refers to as 'the sceptical Philosopher' (EIP 392), and whose *Treatise* he considers to be a work of 'absolute scepticism' (IHM 4). Reid's view of Hume is difficult to make out, because Reid cites both those passages that speak against Hume being a sceptic, and

those passages in which Hume does look like a sceptic. One way to solve this is to ascribe to Reid the view that he distinguished the author from the system. This would paint of Hume a picture according to which he lays down a system of scepticism that, by virtue of nature and our constitution, can't be followed. The problem with this view is that, at times, Reid is aware that the point of Hume's sceptical arguments is to establish that 'belief is more properly an act of the sensitive than of the cogitative part of our nature' (T 1.4.1.8).[10] Reid, under the supposition that it means, in Reid terms, that 'the belief of first principles is not an act of the reasoning power' (EIP 572) even agrees to it.

On other occasions, though, he refers to Hume's theory as 'a system of scepticism, which leaves no ground to believe any one thing rather than its contrary' (IHM 4), which would speak, again, for a conception of scepticism as total suspension of judgement.[11]

A possibly different meaning of 'scepticism' is at play when Reid considers Hume's alleged anti-realism as sceptical.

> However, all these consequences of the doctrine of ideas were tolerable, compared with those which came afterwards to be discovered by BERKELEY and HUME. That there is no material world: No abstract ideas or notions: That the mind is only a train of related impressions and ideas, without any subject on which they may be impressed: That there is neither space nor time, body nor mind, but impressions and ideas only: And, to sum up all, That there is no probability, even in demonstration itself, nor any one proposition more probable than its contrary. (EIP 187)

> [...] and all the laboured arguments of the sceptical philosophy against a material world, and against the existence of every thing but impressions and ideas, proceed upon a false hypothesis. (IHM 70)

Sceptics, in our sense of the word, might employ anti-realist arguments for

[10] Cited by Reid at EIP 572 in closing the discussion of Hume's *Of scepticism with regard to reason*.

[11] And candidly ignoring that Hume tells us, one sentence prior to the the one quoted by Reid, that he has no sympathies for 'this fantastic sect' and thinks that everyone who ever argued against such scepticism has in truth argued without a partner (T 1.4.1.8).

their cause, but anti-realism itself is no aim of the sceptic, as we understand their position today. Take the claim that S knows that p. This entails, given the traditional view of knowledge as justified true belief, that p is true and that S believes that p. Contrariwise, if p is the statement that space exists, then the thesis that space doesn't exist (or that we can't form beliefs about space), if true, makes p unknowable. There is a sense, then, in which anti-realist positions are sceptical, because they entail that we can't know that which the anti-realism is about. But we shouldn't call everything that entails scepticism *scepticism*, for every claim of knowledge entails that the contrary claim cannot be known. But if I know that p, I'm not a sceptic about $\neg p$, although my knowledge of p entails that $\neg p$ can't be known.

It would be easy to say that anti-realism is simply something different and should never be called scepticism, but someone could employ anti-realist arguments to show that we don't know something – or anything, depending on the scope of the anti-realism. Thus, the sceptic might present arguments against the existence of material objects to the effect that, given that we can't refute the arguments, at least we should suspend our judgement about there being material objects. This becomes even more apparent when we consider the belief-component. If one says that we can't conceive mind-independent objects, but that they might still exist, I would consider this to be sceptical. If one says we can't conceive mind-independent objects, therefore there can't be such things, I would consider this to be anti-realism, not scepticism (although scepticism is still entailed).

In conclusion, there are some different varieties of scepticism that Reid addresses, but they all share the fact that they are focussed solely on belief – even the now familiar talk of standards of belief is, for Reid, linked to the demand of suspending every judgement that falls short of the standard. Any of the above sceptics either demand or attempt something that is, in Reid's eyes, impossible: to reject, suspend or otherwise get rid of certain beliefs. And it is on this front, as we will see below, that Reid opposes the sceptic, for we (including the sceptic) have no choice but to believe.

5.1.2.2 No Sceptics

The next problem is that Reid's notion of common sense beliefs as immediate, irresistible and psychologically necessary, together with his apraxia-arguments, entail that there are no true sceptics. Of course, there are still

sceptical systems and philosophers who produce them. With regard to the sceptic who claims that he lacks certain beliefs, Reid's theory entails that the sceptic is confused or lying. With regard to the sceptic who demands that we drop beliefs lacking certain properties, Reid's theory entails that these demands are impossible to be met (and therefore, misplaced). Reid, on the basis of the belief's irresistibility, rejects the demand, as well as the attempt of other philosophers to meet the sceptic's challenge and supply the properties in question.

Here, we'll focus on the former kind of sceptics (those that claim to have no beliefs) and Reid's apraxia-arguments. The underlying assumption of apraxia-arguments is that belief is a necessary ingredient in action.[12] If actions require belief, and if the sceptics act, then the sceptics believe. As such, their claim to the contrary is false.

> This, indeed, has always been the fate of the few that have professed scepticism, that, when they have done what they can to discredit their senses, they find themselves, after all, under a necessity of trusting to them. [...] For I never heard that any sceptic run his head against a post, or stepped into a kennel, because he did not believe his eyes. (EIP 46)

> If a man pretends to be a sceptic with regard to the informations of sense, and yet prudently keeps out of harm's way as other men do, he must excuse my suspicion, that he either acts the hypocrite, or imposes upon himself. For if the scale of his belief were so evenly poised, as to lean no more to one side than to the contrary, it is impossible that his actions could be directed by any rules of common prudence. (IHM 170)

> All that we would ask of this kind of Sceptic is, that he would be uniform and consistent, and that his practice in life do not belie his profession of scepticism with regard to the fidelity of his faculties: For the want of faith, as well as faith itself, is best shown by works. If a Sceptic avoid the fire as much as those who

[12] It might even be that some of the first principles yield beliefs independently of whether we act or not, such as the first principle that we are conscious of our thoughts. Because Reid's argument is based on the idea that we know, from the sceptic's actions, that the sceptic believes, he could still, theoretically, claim that he has suspended those beliefs that are not part of any actions he is performing – if there are any such beliefs.

> believe it dangerous to go into it, we can hardly avoid thinking his scepticism to be feigned, and not real. (EIP 571)

On most other occasions, Reid is as radical as he is in these passages, outright denying that the sceptic achieves his task of shedding, or living without, certain beliefs. Sometimes, however, he is a little more liberal and allows that the sceptic might achieve a part of his task, but only for some short periods of time.

> We are born under a necessity of trusting to our reasoning and judging powers; and a real belief of their 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. (EIP 481)

Another occasion that displays a more liberal attitude is when he seems to limit his thesis of common sense beliefs to particular, as opposed to general, beliefs.

> Many Sceptics have denied every general principle of science, excepting perhaps the existence of our present thoughts; yet these men reason, and refute, and prove, they assent and dissent in particular cases. They use reasoning to overturn all reasoning, and judge that they ought to have no judgement, and see clearly that they are blind. Many have in general maintained that the senses are fallacious, yet there never was found a man so sceptical as not to trust his senses in particular instances when his safety required it; and it may be observed of those who have professed scepticism, that their scepticism lies in generals, while in particulars they are no less dogmatical than others. (EIP 482)

Of course, it is still true that, theoretically speaking, my reaching for the mug on the table can be explained by my belief that the mug, a mind-independent thing, stands in front of me, just as I could have the belief that it is mind-dependent and still reach for it. But according to Reid, no one believes that mugs are mind-dependent, because that is just how

we are constituted – because the principles not only yield beliefs, but also many of the most important notions, that is, we have no say in whether our conception of the mug is mind-dependent or mind-independent. And so there is, according to Reid, no one who can suspend all judgements or drop those beliefs yielded by the first principles. Or even, replace the ones we have with ones that do the same job without the realist ontological commitments.

It would be too easy to say that because according to Reid there are no sceptics, he shouldn't be read as attempting to refute them. I think Reid thought that professing scepticism and writing sceptical books was on one hand threatening and on the other, a challenge, and possibly, a chance to correct wrong assumptions. It was threatening because, as I interpret Reid, the common sense beliefs are immune, and much of the discussion has focussed on them and this property of them. But there are other things we might suspend judgement about. Not all beliefs are common sense beliefs. And it might still be bad, in whatever sense you like, to suspend judgement in those cases in which we could.

Another reason that emerged in the previous section is that all the sceptics that Reid envisions are wrong about descriptive psychology. To correct this falsity is a worthy project even if no one is able to fully commit to this falsity. Lastly, Reid assigns to the sceptics the task of questioning everything, which helps at finding wrong assumptions like the way of ideas. He actually praises the sceptics for success on this front.

> For I conceive the sceptical writers to be a set of men whose business it is to pick holes in the fabric of knowledge wherever it is weak and faulty; and, when these places are properly repaired, the whole building becomes more firm and solid than it was formerly. (IHM 4)

In conclusion, the fact that Reid takes there to be no sceptics further supports the thesis that Reid conceives scepticism to be intertwined with psychological assumptions or demands (that can't be met). It also supports the thesis that Reid is not overly concerned with scepticism, that it is a sideshow at best. As such, that there are no sceptics undermines interpretations that overemphasize Reid's anti-scepticism, for example, in ascribing to him setting up a normative epistemology in order to oppose scepticism. If one can't be a sceptic, why would he go to such lengths?

> It is one thing to profess a doctrine of this kind, another to seriously believe it, and to be governed by it in the conduct of life. It is evident, that a man who did not believe his senses could not keep out of harm's way an hour of his life; yet, in all the history of philosophy, we never read of any sceptic that ever stepped into fire or water because he did not believe his senses, or that showed in the conduct of life, less trust in his senses than other men have. This gives us just ground to apprehend, that philosophy was never able to conquer that natural belief which men have in their senses; and that all their subtile reasonings against this belief were never able to persuade themselves. (EIP 99)

5.1.2.3 Scepticism is Irrefutable

We've already seen that the self-described sceptics impose upon themselves, but that leaves open the question of the systems or theories they profess to believe or follow. In saying they are irrefutable, Reid is not saying that nothing can be done, but that a certain kind of argument won't work.

> 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. (EIP 480)

> He is therefore at liberty [...] to rest his scepticism upon this sole foundation, that no reasoning can prove the truth and fidelity of our faculties. Here he stands upon firm ground. For it is evident, that every argument offered to prove the truth and fidelity of our faculties, takes for granted the thing in question, and is therefore that kind of sophism which Logicians call *petitio principii*. (EIP 571)

The upshot is not that Reid doesn't argue against scepticism, but that he takes a certain kind of argument to be useless. Given the second passage, for example, I take it that it restricts the room of interpretations such that

we can't ascribe to Reid arguments that prove the truth and fidelity of our faculties by employing them.[13]

What still can be done, as will emerge below, is to attack the sceptic's premises, like the way of ideas, pointing out inconsistencies, like giving priority to one faculty above the others without a reason, or rejecting demands that can't be met.

> Yet, as this system [i.e., Pyrrhonian Scepticism] was an insult upon the common sense of mankind, it died away of itself; and it would be in vain to attempt to revive it. The modern scepticism is very different from the ancient, otherwise it would not have been allowed a hearing; and, when it has lost the grace of novelty, it will die away also, though it should never be refuted. (EIP 461)

> The Sceptic has here got possession of a strong hold which is impregnable to reasoning, and we must leave him in possession of it, till Nature, by other means, makes him give it up. (EIP 571)

Reid's arguments may help at speeding up these processes, but they will never have the same effect as nature.

5.1.2.4 Reid's 'Scepticism'

Another reason that stands in the way of interpreting Reid such that he is able to refute scepticism is that there are many instances in which he affirms things one could take for scepticism (especially in our modern sense, lacking the psychological implications). Take, for example, the claim that 'our experience could be just the way it is and has been even if the world we believe to exist were very different from the way we believe it to be as a result of that experience' (Stroud 1979: 289). It is obvious why the sceptic is fond of such a claim, even if it, in itself, doesn't yet entail scepticism.

Reid time and again affirms versions of this claim. Now, Stroud thinks, in the discussion the above sentence is quoted from, that any successful theory

[13] Van Cleve (2015: 353) ascribes such an argument to Reid and takes pains to interpret Reid such that he has all means available to formulate it. The result is that Reid has an anti-sceptical argument that is dialectically ineffective against the sceptic. But wasn't the sceptic the only one that really needed such an argument?

of knowledge needs to start from this claim. But Reid doesn't start from it, it is present throughout his work. We'll discuss in more detail Reid's actual relationship with scepticism. For now, let us take a look at those passages which are part of the sceptic's tool-kit, and, at the same time, endorsed by Reid.

Indeed, one instance of the point that our subjective experience could be as it is, even if the world were very different, is that our perceptions could be the same without the objects existing, a point we've established at great length in chapter 3.3. Yet even beyond Reid's non-factive account of perception, he commits himself to this sceptical point, saying that it is possible that our mental life could be as it is without the mind-independent world to exist.

> [No one can] show, by any good argument, that all our sensations might not have been as they are, though no body, nor quality of body, had ever existed. (IHM 57)

Reid doesn't take this as a reason to indulge himself in scepticism. But it shouldn't sit well with an interpretation that ascribes to Reid a position according to which we have good arguments that our sensations and the real world have to line up, or in more broader terms, that our subjective experience is *de facto* a good guide to what physical or material things exist. According to the view that I elaborate here, Reid neither agrees with the sceptic nor with the epistemologist. The sceptical point stands, but it is idle. We have irresistible beliefs that bodies and their qualities exist. The sceptical point changes nothing about us, it is a reason for nothing at all, and we will ignore it – which is a necessary result of our constitution.

> That our sensations of touch indicate something external, extended, figured, hard or soft, is not a deduction of reason, but a natural principle. The belief of it, and the very conception of it, are equally parts of our constitution. If we are deceived in it, we are deceived by Him that made us, and there is no remedy. (IHM 72)

Incidentally, this is the passage that closes the *Inquiry*'s chapter *Of the existence of a material world*. Contrary to what the title suggests, the chapter contains no discussion of the existence of a material world, but

merely pertains to discussions of our belief that a material world exists. Reid, like Hume, takes it for granted that the world exists, and is only interested in psychological questions, the belief's origin, its contents, its role in other mental operations (if any), and so on.

Other passages that include a commitment to the sceptical point are the following:[14]

> This belief, Sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust and without suspicion. (IHM 169)

> Can any man prove that his consciousness can't deceive him? No man can: nor can we give a better reason for trusting to it, than that every man, while his mind is sound, is determined, by the constitution of his nature, to give implicit belief to it, and to laugh at, or pity the man who doubts its testimony. (IHM 17)

If there is no proof that our consciousness does not deceive us, it is at least possible that it might deceive us, thus validating Stroud's sceptical point. And if the best reason for trusting our consciousness is that everyone gives implicit belief to it, I take this as a reason against ascribing to Reid stronger and better arguments, of which there are many. Indeed, many interpreters and philosophers in general think that the fact that everyone trusts in something is a bad reason for trusting in it. If Reid thinks this is the best that can be done, we shouldn't ascribe to him stronger arguments.[15] Additionally, any interpretation that wants to claim coherence with these passages has to leave intact the sceptical point. It is nothing he begins from, and rejects later. It accompanies Reid throughout his work. It is a permanent part of it.

[14]There are numerous examples, many of which we have quoted before or will quote below. Two instances that we have ignored so far, and will not reference below, are EIP 563 and 572.

[15]Besides the affirmation of this general possibility of our subjective experience and the objective reality coming apart, there are numerous instances of more specific sceptical-sounding remarks. One potentially sceptical motif we have already covered (ch. 3.1) is the darkness concerning the source of our beliefs and notions, which is a reason why Reid feels he can only record the phaenomena, but give no fuller account of how things work. Additionally, Reid claims that we have only obscure notions of secondary qualities, and that we have no knowledge of the efficient causes of any natural effect. For a full enumeration of Reid's sceptical admissions, see Marcil-Lacoste (1978: 320).

The purpose of recording these four theses about Reid's relationship with scepticism is, first and foremost, to show how it limits the space of interpretations, as long as we attempt to be as coherent as possible with the text. If Reid believes there are no sceptics, because scepticism is an unbelievable doctrine, which is on top of it irrefutable and partly based on true premises, then it is hard to interpret Reid as facing the sceptic head on by developing a normative epistemology that gives us justified true beliefs of things Reid claims we have to simply trust in.

From what I have shown you so far, it would be wrong to interpret Reid such that he could show that scepticism is false. However, it is clear from the text that there is an opposition to scepticism. I will reconstruct this opposition in line with our previous findings in the next section.

5.2 Reid's Opposition to Scepticism

I can only succeed in my argument if I can account for the above four 'problems', much more so if my reading lets these four theses to be sensible within Reid's project.

Here is what I want to argue for. It is useful to distinguish between a practical scepticism and a theoretical scepticism. Theoretical scepticism is scepticism in general, whereas practical scepticism is the scepticism that is around in Reid's time. We can find a hint at this in his quote that the 'old scepticism' is already off the table, and the 'new scepticism' is only entertained because it is new. Theoretical scepticism is different from practical scepticism in that it is unappealing, among other things. It is idle. My proposal is that Reid is only concerned about the new scepticism, and that he is uninterested in the discussion surrounding theoretical scepticism, not least because he takes it to be irrefutable and to have failed a long time ago. The new scepticism, on the other hand, is intertwined with the way of ideas, and this is why Reid has an interest in it, *because* it 'rests with its whole weight on the way of ideas'. The way of ideas is a thesis within Reid's discipline, he is equipped to deal with it. By rejecting the way of ideas, he can oppose the one form of scepticism relevant to Reid. He can take from the 'new scepticism' the only advantage it had over its old version, and so put it back into its place of long-dead attempts at philosophy.

Another way to capture what is anti-sceptical about Reid's work is if we

look at the way Reid views scepticism. As something that isn't going away by argument, as a temporary fashion, and as 'resting with its whole weight on the way of ideas'. We'll look into the way of ideas in a moment, but its core claim is that ideas exist, and that they are the intermediaries between the world and the mind. They are the direct objects of perception, and they represent the world to us.

Reid rejects the way of ideas, and much of his work can be seen as a reconstruction of a philosophy of mind that works without ideas. This need becomes apparent if we take a look at Hume, for example. Hume reduced everything, or most of it in any case, to ideas: beliefs are modes of having ideas, remembering is having an idea, minds are actually just successions of ideas, and so on. Without ideas, there is a lot to be explained anew. And Reid supplies these explanations, first with regard to the senses (in the *Inquiry*) and then with regard to our faculties, in the *Essays*.

By rejecting the way of ideas, Reid doesn't reject scepticism, but he takes away the occasion to give any credibility to scepticism. Why should I be interested in scepticism? If I believe in the way of ideas, the answer is easy. But with the way of ideas gone, scepticism returns to being idle. It doesn't impress anyone any more.

We can reconstruct his position with regard to scepticism by looking into his actual engagements with sceptics, and by taking a look at his rejection of the way of ideas. Together, we can explain in what sense the four 'problems' from above turn into features of his view.

5.2.1 Dialogue With a Sceptic

Let us begin by returning to the *Inquiry*'s fictional dialogue Reid has with a sceptic. It is one of the longest passages in which Reid discusses scepticism, and, if we zoom out a little, it can be seen as a template of his answer to scepticism, instances of which reoccur throughout his works.

> The sceptic asks me, Why do you believe in the existence of external object which you perceive? (IHM 168-169)

Reid's answer is that it is beyond our power:

> This belief, Sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mind of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it

> is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion. (IHM 169)

The sceptic continues to press the point that we ought to drop every belief that is not founded upon reason.

> Reason, says the sceptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. (ibid.)

Reid answers not by meeting the sceptics challenge, but by rejecting it on grounds that to privilege reason is arbitrary. This is, in effect, one of the ways Reid envisions we can still argue about first principles. If someone accepts one yielding beliefs that are irresistible, immediate and psychologically necessary, but not another that likewise has these properties, Reid thinks that one is being inconsistent: 'Thus the faculties of consciousness, of memory, of external sense, and of reason, are all equally the gifts of Nature. No good reason can be assigned for receiving the testimony of one of them, which is not of equal force with regard to the others' (EIP 463).[16]

> 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? (ibid.)

At this point, the sceptic turns Reid's reasoning on its head, agreeing to the equal treatment, but on that ground rejecting reason as well as perception.

> Perhaps the sceptic will agree to distrust reason, rather than give any credit to perception. For, says he, since, by your own concession, the object which you perceive, and that act of your mind, by which you perceive it, are quite different things, the one may exist without the other; and as the object may exist without being perceived, so the perception may exist without an object. (ibid.)

[16] He seems to miss that there might be reasons why we privilege one over another, for example, that the cogito is special not because of the usual three properties, but because of the special relation between *I think* and *I exist*.

This is Stroud's point once more. And Reid embraces the concession. From here, the sceptic demands that we drop our beliefs in external objects.

> There is nothing so shameful in a philosopher as to be deceived and deluded; and therefore you ought to resolve firmly to withhold assent, and to throw off this belief of external objects, which may be all delusion. (ibid.)

At this point, the epistemically-bent interpreters have Reid replying that we *are* justified in our beliefs in external objects, that we know that they exist, and therefore, that the sceptic is wrong. But Reid's reply is not that. He gives three reasons, none of which involve any normative notions, and none of which even consider the truth or falsity of scepticism.

> For my part, I will never attempt to throw it off; and although the sober part of mankind will not be very anxious to know my reasons, yet if they can be of use to any sceptic, they are these. First, because it is not in my power. (ibid.)

Which is followed by a passage I have quite extensively quoted before, stating that the attempt to throw of our beliefs is fruitless, because 'my belief is carried along by perception, as irresistibly as my body by the earth' (IHM 169), and closing with the observation that the sceptic, after he spent all his strength in vain, is 'carried down the torrent with the common herd of believers' (ibid.).

> Secondly, I think it would not be prudent to throw off this belief, if it were in my power. If Nature intended to deceive me, and impose upon me by false appearances, and I by my great cunning and profound logic, have discovered the imposture; prudence would dictate to me in this case, even to put up this indignity done me, as quietly as I could, and to call her an impostor to her face, lest she should be even with me in another way. (IHM 169-170)

We should take special notice of the conditional nature of this second reason. Even if we could, which we don't, it wouldn't be prudent. Why wouldn't it be prudent? Because if we were to throw off our beliefs, which we can't, we would stumble from one injury into the next, and if we are lucky and survive

the first minutes, we would be 'taken up and clapt into a mad-house' (IHM 170). Because nobody wants that, it wouldn't be prudent.

Reid's third reason is the inversion of this point.

> I gave implicit belief to the informations of Nature by my senses, for a considerable part of my life, before I had learned so much logic as to be able to start a doubt concerning them. And now, when I reflect upon what is past, I do not find that I have been imposed upon by this belief. I find, that without it I must have perished by a thousand accidents. I find, that without it I should have been no wiser now than when I was born. [...] Therefore, I consider this instinctive belief as one of the best gifts before of Nature. I thank the Author of my being who bestowed it upon me, before the eyes of my reason were opened, and still bestows it upon me to be my guide, where reason leaves me in the dark. And now I yield to the direction of my senses, not from instinct only, but from confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor, grounded upon the experience of his paternal care and goodness. (IHM 170)

Of course, if we would die a thousand deaths without them, it is useful to have them. The more interesting part is that Reid doesn't reason from their usefulness, and, one might be tempted to say, reliability, to their justification, or them constituting knowledge. Instead, he still yields to them by instinct, but also from confidence and trust in God.

All we have, then, is a sceptic that is focussed on demanding that we throw off our beliefs, and Reid pointing out that we can't. The reason, we have already learned, lies in the fact that the beliefs yielded by the first principles are irresistible. Not only is there an absence of normative terminology in Reid's discussion of the first principles, there is one also in his discussion of scepticism. To reject the sceptic's demand can be seen as a way to oppose the sceptic. Therefore, Reid's opposition to scepticism is real, but it doesn't involve setting up a normative epistemology that yields justification of our beliefs in, or knowledge of, say, the external word.

Reid opposes scepticism in that he rejects its demands and its premises (both of which are based in his descriptive psychology and the irresistibility and psychological necessity of, among others, perceptual beliefs). Reid holds

that there are no actual sceptics because of his theory of beliefs and his view on actions requiring beliefs (which is still based within his descriptive psychology). Scepticism is irrefutable in the sense that there is no way that we can prove that our faculties are non-fallacious without a vicious circle (every argument for the non-fallaciousness of our faculties assumes that they are not fallacious). Reid's answer to the sceptic is 'sceptical' in that it maintains, with the sceptic, that there can be perception without objects and objects without perception. Thus, all the problems an epistemic reading is facing with regard to Reid's relationship with scepticism neatly fit into my account of Reid as a descriptive psychologist and the first principles as being the principles that determine which beliefs are produced by that part of the faculty of judgement we share with everyone else, which Reid calls *common sense*.

5.2.2 The Way of Ideas

To reject the sceptic's demand is not Reid's only opposition against scepticism. Another is the rejection of the way of ideas.[17] From the discussion of the four problems, we have learned that Reid affixes more than one meaning to 'scepticism'. One way in which he approaches the topic is through the distinction, in my terms, between practical and theoretical scepticism.

> The modern scepticism is very different from the ancient, otherwise it would not have been allowed a hearing; and, when it has lost the grace of novelty, it will die away also, though it should never be refuted. (EIP 461)

What is modern about modern scepticism is nothing in its core, so to speak, but in its occasion. I say occasion and not premise, because Reid is not so much concerned with the logic of scepticism – what premises we can derive it from etc. – as the psychology of it. The way of ideas *can* act as a premise for a sceptical conclusion,[18] but, as Reid is aware, not

[17]Note that our focus is on scepticism, because we want to understand and explain why Reid is generally interpreted as an epistemologist. For Reid, the rejection of the way of ideas is much more important, and takes up considerably more space within his works than those spare comments about scepticism. If not for the secondary literature, we would have a chapter on the way of ideas, with a short excursion about scepticism, and not the other way around, as is the case now.

[18]Reid supplies an argument to that effect at EIP 289. He records that ideas have no continued existence, but the objects of senses have. Given that ideas are always what is

all proponents of the way of ideas were sceptics, and their systems were not outright sceptical.[19] It is more that, psychologically, the thesis that all we ever directly perceive are ideas, and not the real objects, simply invites scepticism, or more properly, it turns the sceptical problem from something uninteresting and lame into a problem we urgently want to be solved. Compare Reid's admission that there can be perceptions without objects with the way of ideas' claim that the immediate objects of perception are always ideas, that we never directly perceive the world. Whereas the former is more akin to a possibility – we know that it sometimes happens –, which is resolved along practical lines (we vet our perceptions with further perceptions), the latter constitutes a constant reason to think of us as severed from the material world.[20] A further complication is that, as we attempt and fail to solve this problem, we dig our hole even deeper. For Reid, the way of ideas is a sceptical prompt, more than a sceptical premise.

It is in this sense that we have to understand passages like the following:

> For my own satisfaction, I entered into a serious examination of the principles upon which this sceptical system is built; and was not a little surprised to find, that it leans with its whole weight upon a hypothesis, which is ancient indeed, and hath been very generally received by philosophers, but of which I could find no solid proof. The hypothesis I mean, is, That nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it: That we do not really perceive things that are external, but only certain images and pictures of them imprinted upon the mind, which are called impressions and ideas. (IHM 4)

The above enables us an understanding of 'leans with its whole weight upon' that need not be strict logical entailment. That, in turn, enables us a more coherent interpretation of Reid's comments on the way of ideas and his arguments against it. You see, if we were to understand the phrase 'leans

directly perceived, how can we conclude the existence of the former from the existence of the latter?

[19] Among the formulations Reid chooses to describe the relationship is that the way of ideas is like the Trojan horse, carrying 'in its belly death and destruction to all science and common sense' (IHM 75-76).

[20] One way to describe this relation takes inspiration from Plantinga's slogan about the connection between naturalism and theism: Scepticism flourishes better in the way of ideas' garden, indeed, it spreads like weed, whereas in Reid's garden, it is not impossible, but the conditions aren't right for it to grow.

with its whole weight upon' such that the way of ideas entails scepticism, we have to ascribe theses to it that Reid doesn't consider to belong to it. This is especially true with regard to material from which we can derive the sceptic's demand that certain beliefs ought to be dropped. We would have to include a normative element within the way of ideas, some standard of belief, say, and the thesis that everything below the standard ought to be dropped. This isn't Reid's understanding of the way of ideas. (Even if it were his understanding, though, it wouldn't require a response to the way of ideas that likewise involves epistemic and normative notions. If the way of ideas has descriptive and normative parts, Reid can still reject the whole package just on grounds of the falsity of its descriptive parts.)[21]

Another hurdle in interpreting Reid's relationship to the way of ideas is that the Reid's usage of the term 'way of ideas' suffers from ambiguity, too. Sometimes, 'the way of ideas' serves as a term to refer to a common thesis, reaching from Plato to Hume. This thesis can be summed up under the label of *representationalism*. But as there are differences between, say, Locke, Berkeley and Hume, it makes much more sense, whenever possible, to discuss particular proposals of proponents of the way of ideas, rather than to work with this general fuzzy notion. Still, there are some parts that he continually ascribes to the general theory of the way of ideas, such as the existence of ideas, the thesis that ideas are the direct objects of mental operations and a trend to reduce mental operations (or, more radically, mental phenomena in general) to the perceptions of ideas.[22] Furthermore, Reid also takes the way of ideas to be generally received among philosophers, albeit without any evidence, and taken to be absurd by the rest of the population.

> [...] What evidence have I for this doctrine, that all the objects of my knowledge are ideas in my own mind? From that time to the present, I have been candidly and impartially, as I think, seeking for the evidence of this principle, but can find none, excepting the authority of Philosophers. (EIP 142)

[21] For example, Wolterstorff holds that '[w]hen Reid spoke of the Way of Ideas, he had in mind a commitment not only to mental representationalism but to classical foundationalism' (Wolterstorff 1987: 406). De Bary, likewise, thinks that '[...] the doctrine of ideas as the only immediate objects of thought doesn't on its own generate scepticism. What generates scepticism is the theory of ideas in tandem with an extremely strict criterion of justification or warrant' (de Bary 2002: 20).

[22] For the thesis that ideas are intermediaries, see EIP 445. For the thesis that the way of ideas tends to reduce mental operations to perceptions of ideas, see EIP 298.

There are many instances in which Reid discusses the way of ideas, and many more in which he disputes with its proponents and their particular theses about perception, memory, judgement, conception, and so on. The chapter entitled *Reflections on the common theory of ideas* summarizes part of his criticism of the general way of ideas. These reflections amount to the following: 1. The way of ideas conflicts with common sense; 2. That there are no strong arguments for it; 3. That its proponents don't agree on anything; 4. That ideas don't explain the operations of the mind; 5. That it leads to paradoxes and absurd consequences in the theories of its proponents.

The lion's share of the chapter is dedicated to the second reflection, which discusses all the arguments in favour of the way of ideas that Reid could find. In turn, he rejects all of them. We will focus on the premises, that Reid rejects, to see whether their rejection is based on Reid's descriptive psychology or something else.

Reid begins his discussion with Locke's remark that he presumes 'it will be easily granted me that there are such ideas in mens minds; every one is conscious of them in himself, and mens words and actions will satisfy him that they are in others' (Locke Essays: I.i.8, 48). Reid replies that he is not conscious of ideas, and that contrariwise, mens words and actions show that they, too, take the objects of their perceptions to be material objects, not ideas.

The next argument,[23] which he credits to Samuel Clarke, Malebranche, Newton and Porterfield, is based on the idea that in perception, the perceived objects act upon us, or we upon them. Reid claims that there is no evidence for this view, and that it results from analogical thinking: 'And as a body is put into motion, by being acted upon by some other body; so we are apt to think the mind is made to perceive, by some impulse it receives from the object' (EIP 177).[24] Reid rejects the first disjunct, claiming that perceived objects are often inactive, and often lack power (in many cases, they lack power altogether, because they lack agency). Likewise, Reid claims

[23]In between these, Reid briefly discusses four arguments from Norris' *Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World*. Reid professes not to understand much of their content, and rejects certain premises, such that perception requires a union between the object and percipient, or that the only objects of science are necessary and immutable.

[24]Reid further adds, some paragraphs later, that this might have been the result of understanding mental operations analogous to impressions, where there is something that makes the impression upon an organ of sense.

that we don't act upon the objects we perceive, not least because it would be an abuse of language to say that we act upon an object simply by looking at it.

> As we have therefore no evidence , that in perception, the mind acts upon the object, or the object upon the mind but strong reasons to the contrary; Dr CLARKE's argument against our perceiving external objects immediately falls to the ground. (EIP 177)

Lastly, he discusses Hume's argument:

> The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: But the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: It was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason. (Enquiry 12.9)

This Reid rejects by invoking apparent and real magnitudes. It is only the apparent magnitude, or the visible magnitude, that is changing, while the real magnitude stays the same.

> I observed that Mr HUME's argument not only has no strength to support his conclusion, but that it leads to the contrary conclusion; to wit, that it is the real table we see; for this plain reason, that the table we see has precisely that apparent magnitude which it is demonstrable the real table must have when placed at that distance. (EIP 183)

None of Reid's rejections involves normativity. He either points to obvious distinctions, as in the case of apparent and real magnitude, or looking and acting, or he remains with the phenomena, and rejects their theoretical reasons. We don't observe ideas, contra Locke, and neither are we acted upon in perception, contra Clarke. For Reid, then, one reason to reject the way of ideas is that there is no sound argument for it. Another reason that Reid gives us in this chapter is that ideas don't explain the mind's operations.

> [W]e must acknowledge, that, though we are conscious of perceiving objects, we are altogether ignorant how it is brought about;

> and know as little how we perceive objects as how we were made. And if we should admit an image in the mind, or contiguous to it, we know as little how perception may be produced by this image as by the most distant object. Why therefore should we be led, by a theory which is neither grounded on evidence, nor, if admitted, can explain any one phaenomenon of perception, to reject the natural and immediate dictates of those perceptive powers, to which, in the conduct of life, we find a necessity of yielding implicit submission? (EIP 178)

One reason why this is so is that Reid subscribes to Berkeley's and Hume's claim that ideas only resemble ideas.[25] If ideas represent their objects by resembling them, they can only represent ideas, and if our mental operations are all reduced to the perception of ideas, they yield us no notions but of ideas. This leads to the above problem that the theory of ideas doesn't help at explaining the phenomena, but it also leads to a counterargument, because, insofar as we have knowledge of things that are not ideas, we must have come to that knowledge via another route.

> If therefore the theory of ideas be true, there can be no knowledge of any thing but of ideas. And, on the other hand, if we have any knowledge of any thing besides ideas, that theory must be false. (EIP 450)

So there are no good arguments for it, and ideas don't explain what they are supposed to explain, which brings us to the fourth reflection.

> The theory of ideas [reduces] all the operations of the human understanding to the perception of ideas in our own minds. This power of perceiving ideas is as inexplicable as any of the powers explained by it: And the contiguity of the object contributes nothing at all to make it better understood; because there appears no connection between contiguity and perception, but what is grounded on prejudices, drawn from some imagined similitude between mind and body. (EIP 185)

In effect, this comes down to a violation of the first of Newton's *regulae philosophandi*, which states that 'No more causes of natural things should

[25] See DeRose (1989) for a detailed account of Reid's borrowing of this argument.

be admitted than are both true and sufficient to explain their phenomena' (Biener 2018: 14). Reid himself refers to this rule as stating that invoked causes 'ought to be true, to have a real existence' and that 'They ought to be sufficient to produce the effect' (EIP 80).

Most importantly, Reid rejects the way of ideas because ideas are not observable, which is – given how much place Reid gives to observation in his methodology – presumably the strongest reason.

> This theory [i.e., the way of ideas] I have already considered, in treating of perception, of memory, and of conception. The reader will there find the reasons that lead me to think, that it has no solid foundation in reason, or in attentive reflection upon those operations of our minds; that it contradicts the immediate dictates of our natural faculties; [...] (EIP 445-446)

With nothing for it, and many a thing against it, Reid boldly takes a step forward and rejects the way of ideas. This rejection explains most of his works, because rejecting the way of ideas, especially given its tendency to reduce everything to ideas, creates a void that needs to be filled. If memory, conception and perception are not all perceptions of ideas, then we need a new explanation. In the *Inquiry*, Reid supplies an explanation of our senses, and in the *Essays*, an explanation of our faculties and their operations. Neither his rejection, nor his alternative account of the mind involves normative epistemic claims.

Now I have told you what I think and why I think it. But the fact remains that the great majority of interpreters come to precisely the result that I argue against, i.e., that Reid is doing normative epistemology. In what follows, we take a look at some prominent examples of such interpretations and track where the disagreement lies between them and me, and how this relates to what Reid has written.

Chapter 6

Reid in Contemporary Philosophy

> If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not *true*, nor yet false.
>
> Wittgenstein, On Certainty, 205

In this last chapter, I discuss three interpretations that each ascribe to Reid a normative epistemology. In each case, we will go straight to their respective core claims, their arguments for it, and afterwards reject them on mainly textual grounds.

One notable exception here is Van Cleve, who we have met time and again throughout this dissertation. This is due to two reasons. First, he interprets the items on the list as statements about what first principles there are, which leads to the awkward situation that the things Reid refers to with the term 'first principle' are not the first principles. I tried to avoid such obvious conflicts with the text. Secondly, the resulting view is dialectically ineffective against the sceptic. The only profiteers would be the non-sceptics, who Reid, on my view, views as in no way needing the reassurance that the world exists.

I hope that the more or less arbitrary nature of my choice of the three interpretations is cushioned by the readers ability to see how my response would be to the remaining interpretations. Keith Lehrer is included because he is one of the most prominent interpreters and because he has shaped the

ensuing discussion and rediscovery of Reid. Philip De Bary has written a widely published monograph on Reid's answer to scepticism. Patrick Ryisew has published many articles on a wide range of topics relevant to the themes I have here touched upon, and in fact has directly addressed my thesis in a paper entitled *Reid and Epistemic Naturalism*, the discussion of which follows immediately below.

6.1 Rysiew: Reid's Constitutive Principles

Rysiew has extensively written on Reid, including his notion of evidence (part of which we have already discussed in 3.4), first principles, his relationship to pragmatism and Wittgenstein, and the role of the seventh first principle. Discussion of Rysiew is especially helpful, because he addresses the issues of this dissertation head on, although he finds himself on the other side of table.

In one of his works, *Reid and Epistemic Naturalism*, he addresses the question of where to locate Reid within this contemporary debate regarding naturalized epistemology, finding that Reid, on one hand, agrees to the naturalist's thesis of a continuity between science and epistemology, while, in his eyes, also firmly committing himself to a normative epistemology. Rysiew takes the question that arises for contemporary participants to be 'how far purely descriptive, psychological matters can or should inform the traditional evaluative epistemological enterprise' (Rysiew 2002: 437). The resulting view takes Reid's first principles as constitutive principles, meaning 'that they are simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive, and thus that with regard to them there is simply no fact/value gap to be bridged' (Rysiew 2002: 437).

Thus, according to Rysiew, common sense, evidence and first principles are all both descriptive as well as normative. It should be noted that because of its obviousness to such proponents as Rysiew, there is not much effort at establishing such claims. For example, common sense is taken to be normative, because 'it suggests reasonableness' – missing that we could understand reasonableness descriptively – and because the German 'gesunder Menschenverstand' is often the suggested translation, its literal meaning being 'healthy human understanding' (Rysiew 2002: 442). Not only is this sketchy, to say the least, there is also the German 'Gemeinsinn', which lacks

terms one might take be normative (and, again, 'healthy' can be used descriptively, as well).

With regard to the question of whether common sense is a faculty or a set of beliefs, Rysiew (2002: 442) claims, wrongly, that in his later writings and mature work, common sense is more often spoken of as a set of beliefs. But it is in the EIP, his later and mature work, that he fully commits himself to common sense being a faculty. The only chapter that ever deals with common sense systematically, as we have seen, is located within the EIP's essay on judgement. Rysiew, however, simply passes over that whole chapter and continues to identify the first principles with common sense beliefs.

Noting that both Reid and Hume acknowledge the irresistibility of certain beliefs, Rysiew takes the difference between the two to lie in the fact that Hume claims that we have no justificatory grounds for them, whereas Reid supplies such justificatory grounds (Rysiew 2002: 444).

In explaining to us these justificatory grounds, Rysiew subscribes to Keith DeRose's (1989) understanding of Reid's position. According to DeRose, we have three choices with regard to our common sense beliefs: Trust them all, trust only some of them, or trust no one. The odd thing is that part of the argument for the first option is that the second and third are psychologically impossible, as has been established here, and as is also known to Rysiew. But this undermines the supposed fact that we had three choices. And although Rysiew concludes that the first option, to trust them all, is the only reasonable option, he misses, that by his own admissions, it was the only option we ever had, or, to speak more clearly, there was never any choice. It is an odd choice of words to call something removed from our control and without alternative 'a reasonable option'.

Again and again, Rysiew does the split between the psychological necessity of believing, and this being a reasonable choice, a reasonable strategy, or there being no reasonable alternative to trust.

> Indeed, when to the fact that we (do or could) have no *reasonable* alternative to our basic beliefs we add the further observation that they are irresistible, it becomes clear that we have no alternative *whatsoever*. (Rysiew 2002: 447)

The fact that they are irresistible is already sufficient for the fact that we have no alternative whatsoever.

Nevertheless, Rysiew continues to move straight to the question that is most relevant for us.

> And what exactly is supposed to be the source of their authority, of their being things we not only do abide by but ought to abide by, if this source is not and cannot be any sort of argument? That the principles are apt descriptions of our credal lives is something nobody denies; but whence derives the prescriptive character which Reid so clearly takes these principles to have?
>
> [...]
>
> The difficulty, I suggest, is due to our assuming that any account of what makes these principles not just descriptive but *prescriptive* – things we not only do but ought to believe – must be in terms of something other than the principles themselves. (Rysiew 2002: 449)

In Rysiew's eyes, the principles are their own source of authority (ibid.). What follows is an odd piece of argumentation. It begins by Rysiew noting that Reid, at times, and among many other things, calls the principles 'axioms'. Next, he finds in his *Webster* that axioms are fundamental or universal rules (and ignoring the other entries), which brings him to Searle and his talk of constitutive rules.

The idea of constituting rules, of, say, football or chess, is that they 'create the very possibility of playing such games [like football or chess]' (Searle 1969: 33-4), and according to Rysiew, the constitutive principles create the very possibility of cognizing at all (Rysiew 2002: 449). I would think that the rules of chess are precisely not normative, because they are constitutive, but let us pass over this point, because the crux, at least for us, comes now.

> In the case of the first principles of common sense, of course, the relevant activity, namely cognizing, is both global and mandatory: it is an activity one cannot help engaging in (what, after all, is the alternative?); and it is an activity that one engages in whenever one is engaged in any (other) activity at all. Some might object that prescriptions are apt only when the activity in question is voluntary. (Rysiew 2002: 450)

Indeed it does. And we have already seen that this is Reid's view, fully and plainly expressed in the EAP. Nevertheless, Rysiew finds Reid to be a follower of Aristotle's conception of norms.

> It seems to me, however, that this objection rests on an undefended conception of norms – one that Reid would have rejected as too narrow. As he, following Aristotle, might put it: if one is a carpenter, there are certain rules which one ought to follow *qua* carpenter, whether or not one is a carpenter voluntarily, and whether or not one can avoid performing the activity in the prescribed manner: it is the nature of the activity itself, and not the fact that one freely engages in it, which makes the performance of certain actions right or wrong (cf., e.g., *Nicomachean Ethics* 1 vii). In this way too, the suggestion would be that [...] norms can be given by nature itself – by the nature of the activity, thing, or creature at issue. [...]
>
> And precisely because they play this constitutive role, so long as we are engaged in the activity of cognizing, we not only must but *ought to* abide by them. (Rysiew 2002: 451)

At this decisive point in the argument, there is not one reference given to support the claim that Reid's conception of norms is borrowed from Aristotle. To the contrary, we have already seen, in the discussion of Reid's principles of action, that it is exactly Reid's view that prescriptions are only apt when the activity in question is voluntary. Thus, it is, according to Reid, a plain contradiction to claim that one not only must but ought to abide by the first principles.

6.2 De Bary: Reid's Truth Claim

According to de Bary's (2002) monograph *Thomas Reid and Scepticism*, Reid is a foundationalist, and more specifically, a reliabilist. As a foundationalist, Reid would divide our knowledge (here conceived as known propositions) into two classes, basic and non-basic propositions. The basic propositions are justified by themselves (they could be self-evident, for example), and they also justify the non-basic propositions. As a reliabilist, Reid would think that the justification of the basic propositions consists in

them being produced from reliable faculties. Because he also interprets Reid as being an externalist, we don't need to know that our beliefs are reliable in order for them to be justified (de Bary 2002: 61).

De Bary structures his account of Reid along the lines of Chisholm's discussion of 'the problem of the criterion', thinking that Reid is a particularist. A particularist takes himself to be able to answer the questions 'How are we to decide *whether* we know? What are the *criteria* of knowledge?', because he thinks he has at his disposal already the particular instances of knowledge, that is, the answer to the other pair of questions: '*What* do we know? What is the *extent* of our knowledge?' (de Bary 2002: 37-8).

De Bary's Reid answers the latter question with the basic beliefs, characterized by them being irresistible, immediate and necessary. From these, he generalizes to reach his first principles of common sense. Thus, initially, de Bary joins Marcil-Lacoste in thinking that the principles are inductive generalizations of particular self-evident beliefs: 'these most general natural laws of assent are, of course, the first principles of common sense' (de Bary 2002: 36). If we were to leave it at that, first principles would be descriptive, psychological laws of assent, without any substantial epistemological bite.

Taking the principles to be (descriptive) laws of assent would place de Bary close to my own position, but de Bary goes on to add some further theses about Reid's principles, (i) that the principles are generally true, (ii) the Innateness Claim, (iii) the Truth Claim, and (iv) that the principles are criteria of knowledge. All these are based on the idea that Reid is not only arguing with the sceptic (one who is interested in questions of knowledge and justification), but that Reid wins the argument.

As psychological laws of assent, generalized from original beliefs, the first principles can be true without their instances being true. They would simply describe the beliefs we have, whether these are true or false. This is also the reason why they would lack the aforementioned epistemological bite. The sceptic might agree wholeheartedly and still retain that the instances of belief subsumed under the law are all false, or as Hume is sometimes interpreted, that we are subject to these laws of assent, but that we have no positive reason to trust them, even if we are psychologically forced to do so.

This view is wholly consistent with Reid's fallibilism (we are not perfect and some of our beliefs are false), as I have just illustrated, but de Bary spends a whole chapter on discussing the alleged tension between Reid's

foundationalism and fallibilism. Although fallibilism encompasses much more, de Bary primarily focusses on the conflict between perception and memory being non-factive and the formulation of the principles (a tension first brought up by Cummins (1974) and also discussed here, in chapters 3 and 4). Throughout the chapter de Bary treats the first principles as foundational, which would speak in favour of Reid being a methodist, not a particularist. This is also at odds with his prior opinion that the original beliefs, from which the principles are generalized, are the true foundations. Not only are the principles taken to be foundational, they are also, suddenly, given a metaphysical reading in the sense specified in chapter 4, as involving both the world and the mind. On *that* reading, the possibility that we perceive non-existent objects, and the fifth principle understood as saying that whenever we perceive an object, it exists, are, of course, incompatible. De Bary's solution to this pseudo-problem (for him, given his understanding of principles as generalized laws of assent), is to reinterpret the principles.

The solution that removes the tension, for de Bary, lies in departing from the wording of the first principles, which, in his eyes, 'is to concede at most an authorial oversight on Reid's part' (de Bary 2002: 61). The first principles need to be seen as general truths, not as universal ones. It isn't that all things that we perceive exist, as the fifth principle states. Rather, if Reid would have written what he meant, the fifth principle would say *That most of (!) those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be.*

De Bary's only evidence for the idea that Reid thinks of his principles as general truths comes from a passage from the second essay. There, Reid says that 'we have reason to conclude in general – that [...] our perceptions and sensations correspond to those impressions, and vary in kind, and in degree, as they vary' (EIP 76). I find that this is a shallow base to attempt a reinterpretation of what is seen as a core-piece of Reid's philosophy – it is one singular passage hundreds of pages before the principles are laid down.[1]

The same context features another passage in which de Bary seems to

[1] As to the context of the passage, Reid there presents the biological or anatomical side of perception. That is, his conclusion is empirical, based on observation and experiment, and therefore not even in principle suited to establish a truth about the relationship between mind and mind-independent world. Our access to the latter is always mediated through the operations of the mind, and Reid's opinion is that we could have all those operations without any mind-independent world or objects therein (IHM 57).

locate Reid on the methodist side of the debate, while, at the same time, revealing quite nicely the picture that de Bary has of Reid. A picture, I might add, for which there is no evidence.

> Reid's first principles lack the certainty that 'classical' (or more particularly 'Cartesian') foundationalists in the way of ideas claim for theirs – and we can hazard that this is a matter of regret for Reid. No doubt he would have *liked* it if his first principles could have been made absolutely demon-proof; but they cannot be, and so he offers them anyway, *faut de mieux*. (de Bary 2002: 61)

We have already discussed numerous passages in which Reid equally laughs at and ridicules the sceptic as he does the attempt to meet the sceptic's challenge. Not to mention his whole outlook of an anatomist of the mind, who has limited his methods to those of observation and experiment. No observation, no experiment will yield demon-proof principles. Of course, if one thinks to have such intimate knowledge of what Reid would have liked, we have a piece of an explanation of how so different conclusions have been reached about Reid's philosophy. Here, for repetition's sake, is another passage that displays Reid's attitude towards the attempt to reach demon-proof principles.

> We cannot give a reason why we believe even our sensations to be real and not fallacious; why we believe what we are conscious of; why we trust any of our natural faculties. We say, it must be so, it cannot be otherwise. This expresses only a strong belief, which is indeed the voice of nature, and which therefore in vain we attempt to resist. But if, in spite of nature, we resolve to go deeper, and not to trust our faculties, without a reason to show that they cannot be fallacious; I am afraid that seeking to become wise, and to be as gods, we shall become foolish, and being unsatisfied with the lot of humanity, we shall throw off common sense. (EIP 497)

To my eyes, this doesn't look like Reid is bemoaning that his first principles are not demon-proof. He, a devout Christian, wouldn't 'like' anything that qualified as 'seeking to be as gods'. To the contrary, this could go as far as

saying that the attempt is morally reprehensible.[2]

To summarize, de Bary reinterprets the principles as general truths. If taken as laws of assent, we can likewise hold that they are true. In the latter case, there is yet no threat to scepticism implied. And since de Bary goes on to supply such a threat, I attempt to interpret his account of Reid's principles along the lines of laws rather than general metaphysical truths. This task isn't easy, though, because when we come to the Innateness Claim, de Bary focusses on passages according to which the principles are beliefs. Indeed, he doesn't speak for himself, and instead proceeds solely on the basis of quotes from the *Inquiry*. One can of course believe laws, but since the laws are supposed to be generalizations of the basic beliefs, it is hard to understand what it means that they are innate. Their instances are innate, from which we inductively reach the law. One can tell a story that we innately and unconsciously believe the laws, and that the process of generalization reveals, or makes conscious, the belief we have had all the time, but this story isn't told by de Bary. Instead, he simply switches back and forth between principles being laws of assent, them yielding true beliefs and them being innate beliefs themselves (de Bary 2002: 64-5).

More importantly is the Truth Claim, i.e. the claim that the first principles 'generate, if they are not themselves already, true beliefs' (de Bary 2002: 65). Note that this is wholly different from the claim that our laws of assent are true, because their truth doesn't entail that the particular instances of belief are all true. The Truth Claim, in contrast, says that all original beliefs are true. Now I assume, more so from the fact that de Bary aims for a reliabilist interpretation, that this, too, is intended as allowing for the occasional mishap, so that the Truth Claim says more properly that, in general, our original beliefs are true.

Before we get into the details of how de Bary motivates the Truth Claim, we are now in a position to understand why the principles are criteria of knowledge.

> At this point, an externalist assumption is imported to the effect that these winnowed-down 'original' beliefs are true beliefs and amount to knowledge, of a foundational kind. Now generalized

[2]Among his reasons against hypotheses and speculative theories is that they are creatures of men, whereas what they seek to describe is a work of God. Given this hierarchical view of men's place in the order of things, it is not a compliment to say that someone seeks to be as God.

> first principles, of themselves, are not criteria – they are simply, as Louise Marcil-Lacoste puts it, 'laws of assent to self-evident propositions'. But with the externalist 'truth assumption' in place, they can function *like* criteria. (de Bary 2002: 40)

If we go back to Chisholm's two sets of question, Reid's particularism means that he starts from the basic beliefs (those that are irresistible, immediate and psychologically necessary). With these, he is able to formulate the first principles by means of induction and generalization. First principles, so far, are mere psychological laws of assent. But if we add that the beliefs they range over are, in general, true beliefs, the principles in effect give us the whole foundational base. With respect to the question 'How are we to decide whether we know?', de Bary imagines that Reid would answer that it is a sufficient condition for knowledge that a belief is original or that it is derived by our non-fallacious faculties from an original belief (de Bary 2002: 40). The first principles tell us when a belief is original and they also entail the non-fallaciousness of our faculties (this is simply what the seventh principle states). Therefore, we can, by means of the first principles, decide for each belief whether it amounts to knowledge or not.

So where does the Truth Claim come from? First, let us distinguish between expressions of the Truth Claim, and passages that seem to support, presuppose or otherwise relate to it. Upon introduction of the Truth Claim by de Bary, the place most likely to find a passage containing an expression of Reid of the Truth Claim, we are only given these two passages from Reid:

> Thus, the belief we have, that the persons about us are living and intelligent beings, is a belief for which [i.e. for the *truth* of which], perhaps, we can give some reason, when we are able to reason; [...] (EIP 467, de Bary's addition)

> [...] to suppose a general deviation from truth among mankind in things self-evident, of which no cause can be assigned, is highly unreasonable. (EIP 466)

In opposition to de Bary, I can't find an expression of the Truth Claim in these two passages. With regard to the former, we might find reasons that our innate beliefs are true, but that is different from them being true. As to the latter passage, we've already made that point, but one good reason why

it might be unreasonable is because it is impossible – which would leave open the question whether they are true. Albeit that is a question, as Reid will point out, that is absurd and useless. And *that* is his 'attack' on scepticism, not to claim that all common-sense beliefs are true.[3]

After stating the Truth Claim, de Bary focusses on its link to the Innateness Claim.

> But now a most important question arises. Reid clearly takes it that the beliefs which come under first principles thus 'marked' are true beliefs (they are 'first principles of contingent *truths*'); yet the marks (which are in any case suggestive, not conclusive) are marks of what are purely psychological states. Reid may be as correct as you please, descriptively speaking, about the range of beliefs that people instinctively hold true; and he may have arrived, by abstraction, at unerring criteria for identifying these innate beliefs. But, as the sceptic will quickly point out, such psychological description is beside the epistemological point. In the absence of some link between what we shall later call 'the Innateness Claim' and 'the Truth Claim' for first principles, the sceptical challenge as to their *warrant* will not have been met. So the important question is: how does Reid forge such a link? (de Bary 2002: 37)

This link exists, thinks de Bary, because Reid answers the sceptic by pointing to a belief's innateness, not truth. Because this would be an insufficient answer in de Bary's eyes, and because Reid is interpreted to have a sufficient answer, pointing to a belief's innateness must imply something that is sufficient – in de Bary's eyes, truth. In effect, de Bary ascribes to Reid the 'assumption that "innateness implies truth"'. Others have thought so as well, and have located the source of this implication either in God's veracity[4] or in Lehrer's view of the seventh principle as a metaprinciple that guarantees that the first principles are true. De Bary initially rejects both of these attempts[5] and finds that 'Reid's basic procedure with respect to

[3] De Bary *could* have included Reid's reference to the principles and their beliefs as truths. We have covered this in chapter 4 and found that Reid's switching back and forth between truths and beliefs undermines the reliance on them as truths.

[4] We have briefly mentioned some proponents of this view in footnote 12 of the first chapter.

[5] In the end, he seems to tend towards the former option, although in a weakened sense;

this link is not really to try to forge it at all, but simply, baldly, to *assume* it' (de Bary 2002: 83).

So what is the evidence that de Bary produces in favour of this claim? It isn't much, for the simple reason that de Bary finds there to be a 'large imbalance [...] in the space Reid devotes to the Innateness Claim (relatively generous) and the Truth Claim (by comparison, niggardly)' (de Bary 2002: 138). A fact which, for de Bary, is neither surprising nor a reason to question the adequateness of his interpretation.

> But, either way, it is unsurprising that the Truth Claim should be relatively under-discussed by Reid. As an unprovable externalist assumption, there is little that Reid can do to promote it. (de Bary 2002: 138)

What we have, then, is that, really, the only reason for the Truth Claim is that otherwise de Bary can't understand what Reid is up to. He assumes that Reid answers the sceptic, but finds that in those passages in which Reid does answer the sceptic, he does so by pointing to the innateness of beliefs, not to their truth. So whatever is sufficient to answer the sceptic is interpreted to be implied by the Innateness Claim – else Reid would miss his target. And him being a grand philosopher, this cannot be. To drop the initial assumption that brought us into this mess, lest to question it, is a response missing from the interpretation. As we have already shown, it is indeed more plausible that Reid is not primarily concerned with the sceptic, and if he answers him, he does so only on the ground that the beliefs targeted by the sceptic psychologically can't be doubted nor be dropped altogether. One might find this not satisfying, but Reid wouldn't be the only one with such a response. And while de Bary might prefer Moore to the company of Hume, Wittgenstein or Strawson, Reid would be no outlier in thinking that the irresistibility of our beliefs is a reason to ignore the sceptic.

> The most general point to make about Reid's reasoning for first principles is that, overwhelmingly, it is concerned with the Innateness Claim. (de Bary 2002: 138)

That is the result of our survey of the evidence as well, and I suggest that we take this evidence more seriously than de Bary.

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see his tenth chapter, which ends with the quote from Descartes stating that we wouldn't care that our invincible beliefs could be absolutely speaking false (CSM II: 103).

6.3 Lehrer: The First First Principle

Another attempt at securing truth is Lehrer's interpretation of the seventh principle as the first first principle.[6] Lehrer assigns to the seventh principle the role of a looping meta-principle, that says of all the principles, including itself, that they are, in effect, true.[7] One problem is that, over time, Lehrer has combined his own views with his interpretation of Reid and *vice versa*. Here, we detangle this as far as possible and focus solely on those parts that deal with Reid.

Let us start with recalling what the seventh principle was: '7. Another first principle is, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious.' There is one side to Lehrer that suggests that he is an ally to our interpretation of the principle as a means by which the faculty of judgment produces the beliefs it produces.[8]

> There are common sense beliefs that arise from our faculties, innate capacities of the mind, which operate in accordance with first principles that direct them. (Lehrer & Warner 2000: 358)

Or in his monograph:

> These principles are innate principles of our constitution yielding conceptions and convictions of the operations of our own minds, of the minds of others, of the qualities of external objects, and of the laws of nature. (Lehrer 1989b: 8)

But although there is this overlap, Lehrer very easily moves in a completely different direction, by also holding that

[6] Because Lehrer was one of the earliest contemporary interpreters to bring back Reid to the contemporary discussion, his account of the first first principle is also widely criticised, simply because everyone feels they have to say something about it. Here, I will not focus on the many criticisms that have been put forward already, but point towards a piece of the textual evidence that, as of yet, has gone unnoticed in the literature. See Van Cleve (2015: 358ff.) and Rysiew (2014) for a detailed discussion of these criticisms.

[7] As is recorded by Van Cleve (2015: 360): 'Lehrer's actual formulation was "all first principles are trustworthy," where being trustworthy implies both being evident and being true.'

[8] In Lehrer (1989a: 148), the point is made thus: 'Some of our conceptions, the conceptual atoms, must be supplied by innate principles of the mind. It is not the sign to which we respond conceptually that explains how we conceive of the object; it is, rather, some innate principle of the mind giving rise to our fundamental conceptions of objects "by a natural kind of magic".'

> Reid says that the principles of our constitution are first principles of epistemology. (Lehrer & Smith 1985: 33)

And since we have surveyed the textual evidence in detail, we know that this is *not* something that Reid says. However, Lehrer assumes that Reid's position is that

> [f]rom the assumption that some principle is an innate principle of our constitution, Reid infers as a first principle of epistemology that the beliefs arising from it are ones for which we have evidence or which are evident. (Lehrer & Smith 1985: 34)

Now, it would be easier for us if statements like this were conclusions, based on philosophical arguments, or even better, textual evidence, which we could in turn investigate. But these are introductory statements, simply assuming much, if not everything, that we would like to have arguments or evidence for. And they do lack references to anything resembling a primary source.

One key-part in bridging the gap between descriptive psychology and epistemology is, for Lehrer, to understand evidence as closely tied to justification. This becomes apparent from the above passage. The epistemological thing about the innate first principles is that the beliefs produced by them are evident, or have evidence – and evidence yields justification. Other than Alston or Rysiew, however, Lehrer does not even take pains to reject a descriptive account of evidence, nor does he explain away the textual evidence there is for such a view. As I argued in chapter 3, this normative understanding of Reid's notion of evidence is mistaken. Reid treats evidence as 'whatever is a ground of belief', including bad evidence. If evidence yields justification, the notion of *bad evidence* shouldn't exist (or justification would lose its normative bent).

> Reid, in opposition to Hume, holds that the beliefs resulting from first principles are not only natural but evident and justified as they first appear in us. Their evidence or justification is not and cannot be the result of reasoning. There is no problem of justifying our beliefs in the existence of the external world from premises concerning sensations or sense impression. The evidence of such beliefs is their birthright.
> We have turned, of course, from psychology to epistemology, but,

> for Reid, the two are closely intertwined. The first principles of conception and belief are also the first principles of evidence. (Lehrer 1989a: 149)

> Innate principles of our faculties yield these basic conceptions and, at the same time, justify our common sense beliefs in the existence of the things conceived. (Lehrer 1989a: 154)

We have already come a long way, in a sense, without touching upon the seventh principle. With Reid's principles and Lehrer's claim that they yield justified beliefs, we are already in a position to know that scepticism about the content of these beliefs is wrong. That is because of the fact that Reid considers their self-evidence to be something felt, so we also know that we are justified in them. As a result, it is not clear what the seventh principle further achieves, or why it is needed.[9]

Nevertheless, Lehrer, besides understanding it as a principle that yields beliefs and notions, also takes it to be a truth in virtue of which our faculties are trustworthy.

> For if we lack the power to distinguish truth from error, our attempt to do so is doomed. If, on the other hand, we have that power, then it is a faculty of the mind which, according to principle seven, is not fallacious. 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. We might [call] it the looping principle. (Lehrer 1990: 43)

The problem is that the third principle, in a sense, says that the faculty of memory is not fallacious or trustworthy, and the fifth principle says the same thing about perception. So what is the need that the seventh principle meets?[10] Lehrer seems to think that it plays a most important role:

[9] This is a version of one of de Bary's (2002: 77) criticisms of Lehrer's idea that the seventh principle plays this special role. Van Cleve (2015: 360) raises a similar worry, and suggests that Lehrer's answer is to rewrite the seventh principle as saying that all first principles are true, because then it would explain the truth of the other principles. Thus, if someone wants to know why the fifth principle is true, we can answer with the seventh principle. But who would be satisfied by such an answer?

[10] Indeed, he needs to be careful about the principle not supplying something that Reid

> The truth gap is closed by that principle giving rise to knowledge. My conclusion is that the first first principle combining psychology with epistemology to explain our knowledge of the internal and external world was and remains the best explanation of why and how faculties yield knowledge of the world of common sense and the extension of that world in science. (Lehrer 1998: 25)

But why don't the principles on their own explain our knowledge of the world?

Let's leave this problem be, because what we have seen is what Lehrer takes the seventh principle to be, the 'keystone-principle' of Reid's epistemology. Whether we think he requires it or not can be neglected, because, for us, the textual evidence is more important, and indeed, Lehrer produces some textual evidence for the claim that the seventh principle is special. We have already discussed the principles and their exposition in great detail in chapter 4, and so we are, in fact, already familiar with the passages Lehrer cites as evidence. With regard to the seventh principle's priority, Lehrer cites this passage:

> 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. (EIP 481)

And with regard to its looping feature, he cites the immediately succeeding paragraph:

> How then come we be assured of this fundamental truth on which all others rest? Perhaps evidence, as in many other respects

explicitly takes to be absent: '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 judgement of the old. But we are born under a necessity of trusting them' (EAP 179-180). Whereas it appears that Lehrer takes the seventh principle to indeed prove that the faculties are not fallacious, I think that it is really the last sentence that better corresponds to what Reid wants to express with the seventh principle: that we necessarily (in the psychological sense) trust our faculties, that we take them to be non-fallacious. But from the fact that we necessarily trust them, that we necessarily treat them as trustworthy, it does not follow that they are trustworthy.

> it resembles light, so in this also, that as light, which is the discoverer of all visible objects, discovers itself at the same time; so evidence, which is the voucher for all truth, vouches for itself at the same time. (ibid.)

All the weight of Lehrer's interpretation rests on these two passages, and they are a little odd, for the following reasons. One feature, noted before by Rysiew and Van Cleve, is that Reid, whenever else he is addressing these questions, holds that the relevant beliefs are immediate, and explicitly not grounded on a premise such as the seventh principle.

What I want to add, and we have seen this already in our discussion of the seventh principle's exposition, is that the former passage is conditional, saying that *if* a principle can be said to be prior to the others, it would be the seventh. But we can't say that. Reid presumably says what he says because principle seven is more relevant than some of the other principles, precisely in the ways that he says it is, i.e., that we take it for granted in every assent. The faculty of judgement is involved in most of our mental operations, and so the idea that the faculty is not fallacious is an implicit commitment we have *all the time*. So there is a way to explain why Reid says what he says, and by highlighting the conditional nature of what he says, we uphold coherence with his claims of immediacy.

The latter passage, likewise, features a marker, 'perhaps', that suggests that we shouldn't ascribe to Reid the things that follow it. This is true all the more for resting a whole interpretation on such a passage, especially, (i) because we know how Reid comes to be assured of the first principles – they are self-evident – and (ii), because the immediately succeeding paragraph leads us back to terrain Reid is comfortable in. I would think that we should base our interpretation on the passage that starts with 'This, however, is certain', rather than the one that opens up with a 'perhaps', especially so with regard to an author like Reid.

> This, however, is certain, that such is the constitution of the human mind, that evidence discerned by us, forces a corresponding degree of assent. And a man who perfectly understood a just syllogism, without believing that the conclusion follows from the premises, would be a greater monster than a man born without hands or feet.

> We are born under a necessity of trusting to our reasoning and judging powers; and a real belief of their being fallacious cannot be maintained for any considerable time by the greatest Sceptic, because it is doing violence to our constitution. (ibid.)

Rather than being a principle about the trustworthiness of our faculties, Reid explains with this principle why we *de facto* trust our faculties, which we do, and which we do even in the face of their occasional failure. And which we would do even if the sceptics were right – even if our faculties would all be fallacious. Reid simply describes the mind.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

> Sacred to the memory of
> Thomas Reid, S.T.D., [...] who
> in the science of the human
> mind gave everything a fresh
> start, as once in natural science
> that celebrated Bacon, Lord
> Verulam, did; [...]
>
> From Reid's Epitaph,
> Davenport 1987: 507

We began this dissertation by noting that the methods Reid has available according to himself are not suited to pursue a project of normative epistemology. Likewise, when he speaks about what his project is, there is no reason to doubt that he speaks truly when he tells us that his interest is in the science of man or anatomy of the mind. When we came to common sense and the first principles, what he tells his readers is that common sense is a faculty and the first principles mental entities. I have made my case that we should understand them as being involved in the production of beliefs, rather than identifying them as beliefs. And lastly, I have explained how this enables us to view clearly his relationship with scepticism and the way of ideas and what this means for the camp of opponents of scepticism he belongs into. He shares his with certain readings of Hume, Wittgenstein and Strawson, rather than with Moore, Descartes or Locke. I was also able to explain, at least with regard to three of them, what led to the particular proposals of Reid as an epistemologist and how these readings

are mistaken. I hope I was able to suggest how this would play out with regard to interpretations absent from my discussion.

To read Reid as an epistemologist is not *verboten*. It is simply a question of what we are attempting here. If you are interested in contemporary problems and seek inspiration in the writings of historical figures, more power to you. If we want to rearrange a historical work to look what else we can build from it, or how Reid would respond to questions that he didn't consider, those are interesting projects, as well. But we shouldn't mistake these exercises with an interpretation, understood as a task aimed at understanding something or someone. I have shown that we can respect the text much more than is currently done in Reid-scholarship. If we do respect it such as was done here, the result is that Reid's contributions belong to the discipline of descriptive psychology, not epistemology.

That is not to say that Reid's philosophy has no place for epistemology. With regard to beliefs that are not irresistible, and as we have seen, with regard to the weight we give to testimony, insofar we can influence it, there is a place to discuss what we should do. Another venue to explore Reid's possible epistemology would be to shift the focus away from the first principles to his philosophy of science, for example, to his comments on methodology. If we can ascribe to Reid a positive epistemic thesis, one example could be that we *should* abstain from hypotheses and analogical reasoning. That is all the more plausible, because we are constituted such that we tend towards them, but it is not the case that we are irresistibly drawn towards them. Common sense and its principles, however, are the wrong place to look for Reid's epistemology.

There could also be a further realm of moral, but decisively non-epistemic, questions surrounding common sense and its principles, and that is, how to behave within and, especially, towards the frame given by the first principles. While it is fixed that we can't change them, there are a manifold different ways how to act towards them. I think that this is where Reid's theism plays a role, at least for him personally, and that he is among those that advise to 'make a virtue out of necessity'. But we could likewise adopt the sentiment Hume reaches in the conclusion to the *Treatise's* first book, one of 'melancholy and delirium'. So there is a real question as to our attitude towards our *conditio humana*. Do we fall into despair over the alleged groundlessness of the principles that guide us? Do we regard them as God's

presents and rejoice about having them, or do we view them as evolution's happy accident?

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Kurzfassungen

7.1 Kurzfassung

Thomas Reids wichtigster Beitrag zur Philosophie wird üblicherweise als Beitrag zur Erkenntnistheorie aufgefasst, bei der sein Begriff des *Common Sense* eine zentrale Rolle spielt. Wenn man das Quellenmaterial aber genau ansieht, und von Reinterpretationen und Korrekturen im Namen des *Principle of Charity* absieht, dann zeigt sich, dass Reid viel eher einen Beitrag zu einer Disziplin leistet, die wir *deskriptive Psychologie* nennen können. Denn mit „Common Sense“ bezieht sich Reid auf einen Teil unseres Urteilsvermögens – mittels dem wir selbstevidente Wahrheiten erkennen, und mittels dem wir das soziale Leben auf der grundlegendsten Stufe führen, und den wir deswegen auch mit den meisten Menschen gemein haben. Schon hier deutet sich an, dass der Ausdruck „Gemeinsinn“ wesentlich passender ist als der oft bemühte „gesunde Menschenverstand“.

Zeitgenössische Interpreten vernachlässigen solche Textstellen und halten stattdessen Reids Prinzipien des *Common Sense* für besonders aufschlussreich dafür, was Reids *Common Sense* denn nun ist. Gleichwohl zeigt sich auch hier, dass für Prinzipien eine Lesart nicht nur zur Verfügung steht, sondern sich geradezu anbietet, dergemäß die Prinzipien mentale Entitäten sind, die unser Urteilsvermögen lenken, ohne dass wir auf diesen Vorgang willentlich direkt Einfluss nehmen können. Zwar wissen wir so, was es mit Reids *Common Sense* und seinen Prinzipien auf sich hat, es stellt sich aber sofort die Frage, was dann aus Reids Errungenschaften wird, seiner Ablehnung des Skeptizismus und des *Way of Ideas*, sowie die Frage, wieso andere Interpreten Reids *Common Sense* stets epistemisch, und damit normativ, verstehen. Das ist insbesondere deswegen verwunderlich, weil Reid nur dort Platz für Normativität sieht, wo wir uns für eine Alternative entscheiden

können. Diese Alternative gibt es nicht bei den Prinzipien, bzw. den von ihnen hervorgebrachten Überzeugungen.

Weiterhin kann ich zeigen, dass Reids Verständnis des Skeptizismus immer auch eine psychologische Komponente beinhaltet, genauso wie er den *Way of Ideas* als Beitrag zur deskriptiven Psychologie versteht. Der Skeptizismus wird als von einer falschen, psychologischen, Voraussetzung ausgehend abgelehnt, nämlich der, dass wir in der Lage wären, unsere Überzeugungen willentlich abzulegen. Und auch der *Way of Ideas* gehe von falschen, psychologischen, Voraussetzungen aus, nämlich, unter anderem, der Existenz von Ideen als mentale Vermittler zwischen der Außenwelt und dem Geist. Die Gründe, warum zeitgenössische Interpreten zu ihrem Schluss kommen, sind zum Teil auf einseitige Quellendiät zurückzuführen, zum Teil auf ein Missverständnis der Fragen, die Reid beantworten will und der Mittel, die er ihm selbst zufolge dafür zur Verfügung hat. Dies zeige ich beispielhaft an drei prominenten Reid-Interpretationen.

Erkenntnistheorie, Philosophie des Geistes, Thomas Reid, Common Sense, Skeptizismus

7.2 Abstract

Thomas Reid's most important contribution to philosophy is generally taken to be a contribution to epistemology, in which his notion of common sense plays a central role. However, if we take a look at the textual evidence, and if we refrain from reinterpretation and correction in the name of the principles of charity, we will see that Reid is much more concerned with contributing to a discipline we might call *descriptive psychology*. For Reid conceives common sense to be a part of our faculty of judgement – that part which is responsible for judging of self-evident truths, and which is responsible for partaking in the social life on the most fundamental level, and hence, that part which we share with most other humans.

Contemporary interpreters neglect such textual evidence and focus more on Reid's principles of common sense, the idea being that the principles reveal what Reid's common sense really is. Just as in the case of common sense itself, though, not only is there a reading available, according to which the principles are mental entities, which govern our faculty of judgement, without us being able to wilfully influence it, this reading is actually more natural than its competitors. While this answers the question regarding the nature of common sense and its principles, it immediately raises another one, namely what to make of Reid's accomplishments against scepticism and the way of ideas, as well as the question, why other interpreters continuously understand common sense epistemically, and thereby, normatively. This is especially surprising given the fact that Reid allows for normativity only where we are able to choose an alternative. This alternative does not exist for the principles or the beliefs yielded by them.

Moreover, I can show that Reid's understanding of scepticism always contains a psychological part, just as he takes the way of ideas to be a contribution to descriptive psychology. He rejects scepticism on the basis of a false psychological presupposition, namely, that we can wilfully suspend our beliefs. And likewise he rejects the way of ideas, because it proceeds from false psychological presuppositions, such as the existence of ideas as mental intermediaries between the external world and the mind. The reason why contemporary interpreters come to their conclusions is based, in part, on a one-sided diet of textual evidence, and in part on a misinterpretation of the questions Reid takes himself to answer, as well as the means he takes himself

to have at his disposal for such an endeavour. This is shown exemplarily at three prominent interpretations of Reid.

Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, Thomas Reid, Common Sense, Scepticism

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Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbst verfasst habe, und dass ich die, und nur die, Hilfsmittel und Hilfen benutzt habe, die ich auch angegeben habe.
Die Arbeit wurde nicht schon in einem früheren Promotionsverfahren angenommen oder als ungenügend beurteilt.

Hamburg, 28.09.2022