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Reid in Our Time and His
Editor: Cairns Craig

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Editor’s Note

The following papers, which constitute the second of two issues of the *Journal of Scottish Thought* devoted to Reid, further underline both the historical and ongoing philosophical interest in the work of Reid and his contemporaries. The organisers of the conference would like, once again, to thank everyone who participated in the three hundredth anniversary celebrations in Aberdeen and Glasgow, and the editor of the *Journal of Scottish Thought* thanks them for allowing him to publish their papers in this and the following issue of the journal.
In his *Active Powers of the Mind*, Thomas Reid makes a distinction between a ‘theory of morals’ and ‘systems of morals’. The first subject attempts to provide ‘a just account of the structure of our moral powers; that is, of those powers of the mind by which we have our moral conceptions, and distinguish right from wrong in human actions’ (*AP*, 282). This is as difficult an area of philosophical inquiry as any, he says. Although this subject is *about* morality, it is of little practical use for ordinary moral agents and everyday moral life. Just as we should not expect our vision to improve because of what we learn about how the eye operates, we should not expect our moral judgment to improve by having a good ‘theory of morals’ (*AP*, 283): ‘In order to acquire a good eye or a good ear in the arts that require them, the theory of vision and the theory of sound are by no means necessary, and indeed of very little use. Of as little necessity or use is what we call the theory of morals, in order to improve our moral judgment’ (*AP*, 283).

The second subject, ‘systems of morals’, is *within* everyday morality and can be put to practical use by us by reminding us of, and helping us sort out, what should matter to us, and why it should. However, says Reid, these two subjects are usually discussed together, often resulting in needless and dangerous confusion. When this happens, it is Reid’s view that it is the ‘theory of morals’ that should give way, not practical morality: ‘For there cannot be better evidence, that a theory of morals… is false, than when it subverts the practical rules of morals’ (*AP*, 322).

However, if it is borne in mind that these subjects are distinct, Reid thinks, we will see that the ordinary person is quite capable of understanding what morality requires of us. This is fundamental to morality because, Reid says, ‘Moral conduct is the business of every man; and therefore the knowledge of it ought to be within the reach of all’ (*AP*, 185). Although Reid’s *Active Powers of the Mind* offers us a ‘theory of morals’, his account is intended to support this view. So Reid issues a warning to the reader:

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1 Knud Haakonssen and James A. Harris (eds), Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (Edinburgh, 2010); hereafter cited as *AP* in the text.
By the name we give to it [the theory of morals], and by the custom of making it a part of every system of morals, men may be led into this gross mistake, which I wish to obviate, that in order to understand his duty, a man must needs be a philosopher and a metaphysician. (*AP*, 283)

In illustrating what he has in mind, Reid directs our attention to children, offering the following example:

One boy has a top, another a scourge; says the first to the other, “If you will lend me your scourge as long as I can keep up my top with it, you shall next have the top as long as you can keep it up.” “Agreed,” says the other. This is a contract perfectly understood by both parties, though they never heard of the definition given by Ulpian or by Titius. And each of them knows, that he is injured if the other breaks the bargain, and that he does wrong if he breaks it himself. (*AP*, 329)

This passage is typical of Reid’s reflections on morality in his *Active Powers of the Mind*. What may seem unusual to us today is the extent to which Reid, as a philosopher, is interested in exploring the moral development of children, from infancy onward. It is much more common for philosophers today (and even in Reid’s day) to focus primarily on adults, those who, presumably, are far down the road of moral development, perhaps as fully developed morally as they ever will be.

This is as it should be, it might be thought. On the one hand, if we are trying to develop a ‘theory of morality’, isn’t it appropriate to concentrate on those to whom moral questions can meaningfully be addressed? They—not rocks, trees, squirrels, or even foxes—are the subjects whose moral powers need to be understood. Perhaps only the philosophically inclined have a serious and abiding interest in questions pertaining to a ‘theory of morals’. However, ordinary moral agents can seriously entertain at least some basic questions about morality without being philosophers (or metaphysicians)—just as one can address and solve mathematical problems without being mathematicians (or metaphysicians).

On the other hand, if we are trying to articulate a ‘system of morals’, the views of ordinary adults, not just philosophers, should be taken seriously. Ordinary adults have experience in navigating their way through ‘moral systems’, and they at least occasionally puzzle over questions about how they
should live their lives, and why. However, it might be thought that children need not be taken seriously in this way. They are too young and inexperienced to grasp ‘systems of morals’. Of course, children do matter. After all, they are in the care of adults for a significant part of their lives. Eventually children become adults—and thus join those who are capable of reflecting on these questions.

But what if the voices of children are given a hearing, as well as those of adults? Philosopher Gareth Matthews offers this example:

IAN (six years) found to his chagrin that the three children of his parents’ friends monopolized the television; they kept him from watching his favorite program. ‘Mother’, he asked in frustration, ‘why is it better for three people to be selfish than for one?’

Matthews regards Ian’s question as posing a worthy challenge to utilitarian thinking. Can children as young as Ian be encouraged to reflect on such questions? Matthews tried this out with a group of 8–10 year-olds, who carried on a rather sophisticated discussion of fairness and rights, while for the most part resisting the appeal of utilitarian thinking in this case.

We may find it surprising that moral reflection at this level can take place at such a young age; but if we doubt that it can, perhaps we should wonder how (or even whether) children will be able to do this once they are adults. They will have ‘grown up’, we might say. But from what? And what do they bring with them that enables them to do what adults can do? Their lives begin in infancy, before they have any moral notions at all; but by the time they are adults they are filled with them. What has happened?

Reid is interested in such questions of moral development in part, it seems, because answering them can help us better understand what morality is, what its foundations are, and its importance in human life. In focusing on these questions, Reid often employs botanical metaphors—frequently referring to, for example, ‘the seeds of morality’, ‘the seeds of moral discernment’, and the like. This opens up two avenues for exploration. The first compares and contrasts human beings as moral agents with animals (‘brutes’) that, we presume, lack ‘the seeds of morality’ and are, therefore, incapable of becoming moral agents. The second requires us directly to attend to questions of moral development—children on the way to becoming adults.

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Turning to the first, Reid notes that a human being is influenced by a ‘great number of active principles’:

His body, by which his mind is greatly affected, being a part of the material system, is subject to all the laws of inanimate matter. During some part of his existence, his state is very like that of a vegetable. He rises, by imperceptible degrees, to the animal, and, at last, to the rational life, and has the principles that belong to all. (*AP*, 76)

Noteworthy in this passage is Reid’s claim that, even though we eventually develop our rational capacities, we do not thereby abandon our animal principles. They still must be acknowledged; in fact, they must somehow be brought within the scope of self-government, which requires rational powers. But the story is not the same for animals (‘brutes’). They seem incapable of moving significantly into the rational life—and, unlike humans, their flourishing does not require this.

The appetite of animals, says Reid, may be restrained by a stronger ‘principle’, but not by a moral principle:

A dog, when he is hungry, and has meat set before him, may be kept from touching it by the fear of immediate punishment. In this case, his fear operates more strongly than his desire. (*AP*, 97)

This, Reid says, does not incline us to ascribe any virtue to the dog:

The animal is carried by the strongest moving force. This requires no exertion, no self-government, but passively to yield to the strongest impulse. This, I think, brutes always do; therefore we attribute to them neither virtue nor vice. We consider them as being neither objects of moral approbation nor disapprobation. (*AP*, 97)

As far as we can tell, says Reid, animals are incapable of self-government. For example, they are incapable of promising, which requires not only having a conception of promising, but also having a sense of past, present, and future that enables them to make and keep commitments. Reid makes no attempt to determine precisely when children are capable of making promises and being held accountable for keeping or breaking them. We do not know how old Reid imagines the boys playing with a top and scourge are. There is no need
to assume that their rational powers are fully developed; but these powers are developing—gradually, and by degree. At some point (Reid does not speculate about just when this might occur) we acquire a notion of what is ‘our good on the whole’:

It will not be denied that man, when he comes to years of understanding, is led by his rational nature, to form the conception of what is good for him upon the whole.

How early in life this general notion of good enters into the mind, I cannot pretend to determine. It is one of the most general and abstract notions we form.

Whatever makes a man more happy, or more perfect, is good, and is an object of desire as soon as we are capable of forming the conception of it. The contrary is ill, and is an object of aversion.

In the first part of life we have many enjoyments of various kinds; but very similar to those of brute-animals.

They consist in the exercise of our senses and powers of motion, the gratification of our appetites, and the exertions of our kind affections. These are chequered with many evils of pain, and fear, and disappointment, and sympathy with the suffering of others. (AP, 154)

For animals and very young children the focus is largely on the present: ‘The present object, which is most attractive, or excites the strongest desire, determines the choice, whatever be its consequences’ (AP, 154). However:

As we grow up to understanding, we extend our view both forward and backward. We reflect upon what is past, and, by the lamp of experience, discern what will probably happen in time to come…

We learn to observe the connexions of things, and the consequences of our actions; and taking an extended view of our existence, past, present, and future, we correct our first notions of good and ill, and form the conception of what is good or ill upon the whole; which must be estimated, not from the present feeling, or from the present animal desire or aversion, but from a due consideration of its consequences, certain or probable, during the whole of our existence. (AP, 155)

Reid sees a very close relationship between having an adequate conception of our good on the whole and grasping the demands of morality, both of which
require the development of appropriate rational powers and an appreciation of our natural social affections:

… this principle leads directly to the virtues of prudence, temperance, and fortitude. And, when we consider ourselves as social creatures, whose happiness or misery is very much connected with that of our fellow-men; when we consider, that there area many benevolent affections planted in our constitution, whose exertions make a capital part of our good and enjoyment; from these considerations, this principle leads us also, though more indirectly, to the practice of justice, humanity, and all the social virtues. (AP, 163–4)

Reid’s conception that the development from some notion of our good on the whole to ‘the practice of justice, humanity, and all the social virtues’ is somewhat indirect indicates that, although rational concern for our good on the whole and the rationality embedded in morality commend the same courses of action, their principles are actually quite different:

A sense of interest may induce us to do this, when a suitable reward is set before us. But there is a nobler principle in the constitution of man, which, in many cases, gives a clearer and more certain rule of conduct, than a regard merely to interest would give, and a principle, without which man would not be a moral agent.

A man is prudent when he consults his real interest, but he cannot be virtuous, if he has no regard to duty. (AP, 169)

The second avenue Reid’s botanical metaphors invite us to explore is moral development. Seeds grow and take on new properties in the process. However, they do not do this alone or without assistance. This makes evident the need for care and nurture from others if the child is to develop morally or otherwise. Thus, Reid says:

The power of vegetation in the seed of a plant, without heat and moisture, would for ever lie dormant. The rational and moral powers of man would perhaps lie dormant without instruction and example. Yet these powers are a part, and the noblest part, of his constitution; as the power of vegetation is of the seed. (AP, 279)
If we are concerned with how we might best nurture the child’s ‘seeds of morality’, attending carefully to the developmental features of childhood is necessary. This, Reid would say, is a matter of some practical, moral importance. This is so from two vantage points. First, adults have special responsibilities to aid this development. But, second, as they develop, children acquire moral standing and responsibilities in their own right—as children, not simply as potential adults. This, too, should be respected. But, if we reflect on childhood and moral development in these ways, might we learn some things that will help us, as adults, answer our own questions about morality?

Reid’s answer would seem to be yes. After all, we were once children. We grew into adulthood from childhood. We may not remember well (or at all) our earlier years, but it does not follow, of course, that these formative years have had no lasting effect on who we are now—and even how we should be now. Furthermore, reflecting on those earlier years—either by recollection or by observing and caring for those who are now children—might provide some insights into morality for adults. Finally, if childhood is ignored when reflecting on basic questions about morality, to where might one turn for assistance?

Some would say, to God. At various points, Reid himself turns to God. In the middle of the nineteenth century, however, Charles Darwin turned to evolution, saying:

[A]ny animal whatever, endowed with well marked social instincts, the parental and filial affections being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well, or nearly as well developed, as in man.4

We cannot know how Reid would have received Darwin’s theory of evolution. However, given his own account of the differences between the natural constitution of animals (‘brutes’) and humans, it would seem that Reid would have little quarrel with Darwin’s claim. Reid’s account of moral development proceeds with God in the background, assuredly underlying the entire process, but not in a way that intervenes in what could otherwise be seen as an essentially secular story. What is that story?

Reid says that the child’s earliest grasp of moral relations is most likely through observing the behavior of others:

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Our first moral conceptions are probably got by attending coolly to the conduct of others, and observing what moves our approbation, what our indignation. These sentiments spring from our moral faculty as naturally as the sensations of sweet and bitter from the faculty of taste. They have their natural objects. (**AP**, 279)

It should be noted that, although this observing is done ‘cooly’, this does not imply an absence of affect. *Sentiments*, a blending of affect and judgment, arise ‘naturally’, says Reid. By comparing this with the sensations of sweet and bitter, he is emphasizing that these first moral conceptions are not dependent on a process of reasoning (inference from premises to conclusion). However, as moral conceptions they imply reason, insofar as having a conception involves understanding, or the grasp of ideas. Only those with rational capacities (reason) can have moral conceptions.

Examples of both appropriate and inappropriate conduct are, typically, all around us. This can pose a serious problem because, concurring with Aristotle, Reid says that the human being ‘is an imitative animal’, with an instinctive ‘proneness to imitation’. Although we are disposed to imitate what we naturally approve, in some areas (for example, the arts) we learn more by example than rule. In fact, says Reid, ‘human nature disposes us to the imitation of those among whom we live, when we neither desire nor will it’ (**AP**, 84). This is evident, for instance, in the way the people, especially the very young, acquire dialects.

Given that the natural disposition to imitate may not be restricted to morally appropriate conduct, there is a need to make sure that children are provided with examples of moral conduct that are clearly approved by others. It remains the case, however, that children form beliefs before their rational faculties have matured:

... [B]efore we grow up to the full use of our rational faculties, we do believe, and must believe, many things without any evidence at all .... The faculties which we have in common with brute animals are of earlier growth than reason. We are irrational animals for a considerable time before we can properly be called rational. (**AP**, 85)

One propensity very young children share with the ‘brutes’ is what Joseph Butler calls ‘sudden resentment’—a defensive, communicative response to apparent threats and to being hurt. What Butler, Reid, and Adam Smith all discuss is
how this ‘sudden resentment’ needs to be displaced either by resentment that can be well grounded (‘deliberate resentment’) or by something other than resentment in any of its forms (when, as is often the case, there is nothing that one can reasonably resent—i.e., no proper object of the resentment). We might call this the need for *taming* resentment.

However, this ‘taming’ requires the use of reason if it is to yield a sentiment that can fairly be called *reasonable*. This takes us directly into the social environment within which children develop their rational and moral powers. Acquiring the use of reason at all, says Reid, would never happen if we ‘were not brought in the society of reasonable creatures’ (*AP*, 86). Empirical support for this, he suggests, can be found in historical accounts of ‘wild men’ brought up from early childhood outside of human society. Although we know of few examples of such individuals and, therefore, cannot be entirely confident of what to say about them, Reid says:

> But all I have heard of agreed in this, that the wild man gave but very slender indications of the rational faculties; and with regard to his mind, was hardly distinguishable from the more sagacious of the brutes. (*AP*, 85)

How does being reared in a ‘society of reasonable creatures’ help us develop our rational capacities? Reid’s answer is that,

> The benefit he [the child] receives from society is derived partly from imitation of what he sees others do, partly from the instruction and information they communicate to him, without which he could be neither preserved from destruction, nor acquire the use of his rational powers. (*AP*, 86)

So, the child’s self-interest is at stake in the acquisition of rational powers. However, this result (or consequence) should not be confused with whatever motivation, intentions, or purposes that might be involved in acquiring these powers. The same is true of moral powers, which, as already indicated, require at least some rational powers. Reid’s reliance on the ‘seeds of moral discernment’ makes little, if any, reference to motives, intentions, or purposes that a child might have for acquiring either rational or moral powers. But he does discuss some crucial factors that are involved in their development.
As they move from infancy into early childhood, says Reid, children have ‘everything to learn’. He continues:

[I]n order to learn, they must believe their instructors: they need a greater stock of faith from infancy to twelve or fourteen than ever after … They believe a thousand things before they ever spend a thought upon evidence. Nature supplies the want of evidence, and gives the man instinctive kind of faith without evidence … They believe implicitly whatever they are told, and receive with assurance the testimony of every one, without ever thinking of a reason why they should do so. (AP, 86–7)

But, one might ask, how is this possible? Reid’s answer is that, prior to an explicit grasp of basic moral ideas, the child’s behavior can be seen to conform to certain principles. There are two, in particular, that Reid emphasizes. The first is a principle of credulity, whereby the child believes, without critical appraisal, whatever he/she is told by others. The second is a principle of veracity, whereby the child says whatever he/she takes to be true. Although both principles require trusting others, neither is yet a moral principle. Later the child will learn that sometimes distrust in the word of others is warranted, if not wise; and the child will learn how to lie (and why this may be on occasion an attractive option).

That there are these two principles is, for Reid, an empirically supportable claim. That the ‘hard knocks’ of experience lead children to modify their trust in the word of others, as well as their disposition to say what they think, is also an empirically supportable claim. However, this still leaves the question as to what role the principles of credulity and veracity and their modifications might play in the moral development of the child.

Not surprisingly, as children experience ‘hard knocks’ in their uncritical reliance on the principles of credulity and veracity, they experience frustration and anger—both theirs (when let down by others) and others’ (when they themselves let down others). These confrontational moments are normatively loaded—(approval/disapproval, should/ought, and so on) The social environment is one in which it at some point it becomes clear to the child that, even in their moments of ‘cool’ appraisal (of themselves or others), there is normative concern, not simply concern to ‘get the facts straight’.

Still, there is a natural, human desire to ‘get the facts straight’. As Reid puts it:
...the desire of knowledge in the human species, is a principle that cannot escape our observation.

The curiosity of children is the principle that occupies most of their time while they are awake. What they can handle they examine on all sides, and often break in pieces, in order to discover what is within. (AP, 100)

Furthermore, ‘the desire of knowledge is not more natural than is the desire of communicating our knowledge’ (AP, 105). This desire of communicating our knowledge, Reid says, is connected with our desire for esteem, which ‘can have no possible gratification but in society’ (AP, 105).

So, children enter into the social world at a very early age. However, they are voluntary agents in that world long before they make significant use of their rational capacities. Reason and the virtues ‘come to maturity by slow degrees, and are too weak, in the greater part of the species, to secure the preservation of individuals and of communities, and to produce that varied scene of human life, in which they are to be exercised and improved’ (AP, 106).

Just as they do not reason their way into the social world of rationality, at some point (Reid cannot say exactly when) children become capable of two basic kinds of ‘operations of the mind’: the solitary and the social (AP, 330). Solitary operations of the mind ‘may be performed by a man in solitude, without intercourse with any other intelligent being’: ‘A man may see, and hear, and remember, and judge, and reason; he may deliberate and form purposes, and execute them, without the intervention of any other intelligent being. They are solitary acts’. Note, however, that this means that those capable of these solitary acts could only have done so by being at some time in social contact with other intelligent beings—as Reid’s discussion of the ‘wild boy’ suggests. Such social contact, he might say, is necessary for the child to develop the ability to perform certain kinds of solitary operations of the mind.

In contrast, says Reid, social operations of the mind ‘necessarily imply social intercourse with some other intelligent being who bears a part in them’ (AP, 330). They indicate a power ‘of holding social intercourse with [one’s] kind, by asking and refusing, threatening and supplicating, commanding and obeying, testifying and promising’ (AP, 331). These social operations, Reid suggests, ‘appear to be as simple in their nature as the solitary. They are found in every individual of the species, even before the use of reason’ (AP, 331).
It is from this ability to perform social operations of the mind (and be receptive to the social operations of the minds of others) that the child can eventually (actually, very soon) understand social operations of the mind as having moral significance. So, this original ability (not the result of reason, but dependent on reason for its eventual contribution to the child’s moral development) is part of what Reid has in mind when he refers to ‘the seeds of morality’.

None of this, initially, may seem self-evident to the child. Moral ideas seem somehow to ‘grow from’, without necessarily being ‘reasoned from’ earlier forms of trust, anger, empathy, reciprocity. Imitation seems to play as strong a role in their development as reason. At some point, Reid says, we find ourselves with first principles that seem to us to be self-evident. A powerful reason for not wanting to let go of them, and for wanting them to develop in our children, is that the very viability of a tolerable, not to speak of flourishing, social life depends on their being taken seriously. However, it does not follow that this is recognized by children as they come to acquire them, nor that these first principles themselves focus directly on their ‘private’ or ‘public utility’ (Hume). One should not punish the innocent because they are innocent. That observing this principle may support private or public utility is good—but, for Reid, this is a principle of justice. Similarly, one should keep one’s promises because of what it is to promise, not simply because this may also have private or public utility.

Reid offers his account of the moral development of children, not as a ‘proof’ that moral judgments are ‘true’ (something to which he was otherwise committed), but as an account of how morality enters into our lives and as a reminder of its importance to us—and even of its fragility, dependent as it is on our properly attending to the ‘seeds of morality’. Is it possible that our ‘moral sense’ is unreliable, no matter how carefully we attend to it—or that it may simply be in some sense ‘illusory’? Yes, Reid might say, but in just the same way that this is possible for all of our senses. All of these senses (including our moral sense), he says, come from the ‘same mint’. All of our mature senses involve judgment in their employment. All are corrigible. But all, as far as we can tell, are to some extent capable of self-correction. So, Reid concludes, the skeptic cannot be ‘refuted’, but no good reason has been given for doubting the general reliability of our senses, including our moral sense if we tend our gardens well.

Alasdair MacIntyre’s *A Short History of Ethics* mentions Reid’s moral philosophy in exactly two sentences: ‘The successors of Hume and Adam
Smith in Scottish philosophy have little to say to us. Thomas Reid was a rationalist in the spirit of Price.⁵ Aside from the fact that, chronologically at least, Reid was born before both Hume and Smith and outlived them both, summing up Reid’s moral philosophy as ‘rationalist’ hardly seems to do justice to the nuanced moral psychology he offers in its support.

Charles S. Peirce, the founder of pragmatism and of semiotics, used to identify his position not only with ‘extreme scholastic realism’ (8.208), but also with what he called ‘Critical Common-Sense’. It refers to a supposed blending of Kant’s critical philosophy with the Scottish philosophy of common sense, whose best representative Peirce held to be Thomas Reid. Such a melting-pot of ideas seems as glamorous as improbable. It nevertheless was the ideal paring for Peirce, who can be said to have ‘learned the desirability of constructing a system on the German model, but wished to do it with the British empirical method’. In this paper, I attempt to elucidate Peirce’s concept of critical common sense in taking a closer look at the developments of his understanding of Reid. It more precisely aims at accounting for the radical change in Peirce’s evaluation of Reid’s philosophy, first considered as almost anti-philosophical, and eventually the essence of how philosophy should proceed. I want to show it relies on the development of the whole of Peirce’s philosophy, and especially, against all expectations, on his cosmological views.

Peirce’s Early View on Philosophical Common Sense

Peirce was not fated to warmly support Reid’s thought, nor did he have a particular taste for common sense. His logical and metaphysical mind, fond of cryptic discoveries and subtle abstractions, did not resonate with the apparent simplicity of philosophical common sense. Indeed, Peirce advocated against Scottish thought, even making fun of Reid with all the fierce contempt of his mischievous youth: ‘I hold the Doctrine of Common Sense’, he wrote at age 25, ‘to be well fitted to Reid’s philosophical calibre and about as

1 A volume number followed by a dot and a paragraph number stands for the *Collected Papers*. W followed by the volume, a dot and the page number stands for the edition of the *Chronological Writings* of Peirce, and MS (with the number in the Robin catalogue) for the unpublished manuscripts.

effective against any of the honored systems of philosophy as a potato-pop-gun’s contents might be against Gibraltar’ (W1.153). Common-sensism only reflects laziness (W1.71), Peirce claims, for one chooses to stick to one’s most obvious, immediate, prima facie beliefs. In this respect, it is almost the contrary of philosophy, which requires one to examine and to criticize one’s prejudices.

Though he does not state it explicitly, one can presume that Reid would be a good example of the method of tenacity that Peirce condemns in his 1877 text ‘The Fixation of Belief’. What does the method of tenacity consist in? We apply this method by ‘taking as answer to a question any we may fancy, and constantly reiterating it to ourselves, dwelling on all which may conduce to that belief, and learning to turn with contempt and hatred from anything that might disturb it’ (W3.249). Common sense is a variation on such a method, which does not select any answer, but the most common, that is shared by everybody. It thus sounds like a defense of our most natural prejudices.

One would expect Peirce to favor Kant as the critical opponent of common sense. On the contrary! Kant’s aim is to adopt a transcendental view with the help of his critical method, but it is not to Peirce’s taste to make ‘a transcendental orgy’ (W1.314). Worse, what Kant really does, according to Peirce, is nothing more than a psychological investigation into our everyday opinions. ‘In one point of view indeed, pure a priori reasoning is a misnomer; it is as much as to say analysis with nothing to analyze. Analysis of what? I ask. Of those ideas which no man is without. Of common sense’ (W1.111). For instance, the so-called a priori external form of intuition, space, is nothing but our spontaneous representation of space, which has no real primacy over non-Euclidean spaces. It is true that we cannot but start from these representations, but Kant’s critical method is not strong enough. He takes for granted what he pretends to criticize. In philosophy, one indeed needs common sense, but cannot stop there: ‘Metaphysics stands in need of all the phases of thought of that uncommon sense which results from the physical sciences in order to comprehend perfectly the conceptions of the mind’ (W1.111–12).

Thus, from the very start, Peirce considers that Reid and Kant both rely on the ‘immediately given’, meaning not only the contents of perception, but all kinds of naïve creeds and vulgar prejudices. The fact that the one accepts them without questioning whereas the other submits them to a critical investigation does not make an actual difference. Not afraid of paradoxes, Peirce analyses Kant’s (and even Hegel’s) contributions to philosophy as supporting psychologism and common-sensism, for common-sensism is a form of psychologism. Peirce himself is not opposed to psychology, but his
Thomas Reid in America: a Potato-Pop Gun?

‘unpsychological view’ of logic and epistemology requires making a sharp distinction between an inquiry into human thought and the inquiry towards truth.

Peirce’s Change in Mind about Reid

How then is it possible that some three or four decades later Peirce has become a strong advocate of common sense, albeit tempered by critical examination? Reid and Kant, who were supposed to make the same mistakes, eventually are held to correct each other, so that put together they provide the adequate method. In 1905, Peirce clearly identifies pragmatism, the name he gave to his own form of pragmatism, with ‘critical common-sensism’. Such a label uniting the contraries sounds awkward. Understood in a weak sense, Kant’s critical position is indeed not really critical, but directly admits what should be doubted and tested, whereas in a strong sense it excludes common sense, which refuses to criticize our shared beliefs. To sum up, ‘Critical Philosophy and the Philosophy of Common-Sense, the two rival and opposed ways of answering Hume, are at internecine war, impacifiable … The Criticist believes in criticizing first principles, while the Common-sensist thinks such criticism is all nonsense’ (5.505). Puzzlingly enough, this is a confession Peirce made at the very time he coins his critical common-sensism! One could even be more pessimistic than Peirce. Not only do Kant and Reid form a very ill-assorted union, but critical common-sensism risks suffering from the flaws of both the German and the Scottish approaches: if common-sensist, it accepts poorly psychological material; if critical, it discusses such a very unsteady base. As a result, we actually face two problems in order to get an idea of Peirce’s thought: (why) did he change his view about Reid? And (how) did he manage to realize a fruitful mixture of philosophical common sense with Kant’s critical method?

Let me tackle the second question first. Despite their differences, Kant and Reid still share some common points, some of which they also share with Peirce. Though Kant and ‘even Reid’ are nominalists (1.19), they both recognized the importance of the three categories (5.77n). Peirce defends the doctrine of immediate perception, ‘which is upheld by Reid, Kant and all dualists who understand the true nature of dualism’ (5.56). Peirce’s biographer Joseph Brent even conjectures that ‘Because of close similarities between some aspects of Reid’s philosophy and that of the philosopher Immanuel
Kant, it was perhaps also Reid who provided an introduction for Peirce’s study of Kant, and for his denial of Humean skepticism and Cartesian doubt as well.³ The fact that Reid was known through his editor, publisher and tireless expounder, Sir William Hamilton, deserves to be underlined: Peirce had but only contempt for him, especially as a logician, because of the uselessness of the quantification on the predicate, and as a metaphysician, because of his ‘law of the conditioned’ which proclaims the impossibility of knowing the absolute. The pursuit of the unconditioned is an attempt to escape both limitations of the unknowable thing-in-itself and of the implicit contention ‘that our knowledge of the world is “conditioned” by the principle of common sense’.⁴ In Hamilton’s system, Reid’s ‘presentationism’ is a way of defeating Kant’s skepticism: the antinomies are not specific to a reason which would be ‘infected with contradiction’, as Kant believed,⁵ but reflect a poor conception of its powers. Paradoxically, it is thus a Scot who introduces German idealism into the school of common sense. Hamilton corrects Kant with Reid’s direct realism while Peirce rather corrects Reid’s naïve realism with Kant’s critical procedure. But Hamilton may anyway be seen as a primary source from which Peirce attempts to synthesize Kant and Reid, and the extensive annotations of his edition of Reid’s works must have triggered Peirce’s ideas as much as John Stuart Mill’s reply, An Examination of William Hamilton’s Philosophy, whose impact on himself Peirce always recognized:

When Mill’s Examination of Hamilton came out in the spring of 1865, I put the volume into my portmanteau and betook myself alone to a sea-side hotel, long before the season had begun to open, in order that I might study it in solitude; and it influenced me decidedly, and helped me to clear up my opinions. (MS 620, 1909)

Not only the edition of Reid proper should be mentioned, but also Hamilton’s several papers on the comparison between Kant’s and Reid’s doctrines.⁶ So that it could almost be said that critical common-sensism was on its way under Hamilton’s pen, and perhaps that Peirce’s often harsh tone against the ‘little’

³ Joseph Brent, Charles Sanders Peirce: a Life (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993), 52.
⁶ Among others, a portion of an introductory lecture from 1836 on Scottish philosophy, and the paper titled ‘Kant and Reid.'
Hamilton (as compared to William R. Hamilton, the mathematician) may be due to the great closeness of their views. ‘There is a strong general analogy between the philosophies of Reid and Kant’, Hamilton writes, ‘and Kant, I may observe by the way, was a Scotsman by proximate descent’. The topic of Hamilton’s influence on Peirce could be developed further if other matters were not more relevant for my point.

As for the first question about Peirce’s change in view, there are two possible answers. One is to say that Peirce was driven to modify his understanding of Reid in reconsidering the latter’s writings. Armando Fumigalli suggests that he may have been influenced by reading *Thomas Reid* (1898) by A.C. Fraser, whose edition of Berkeley’s works Peirce had carefully reviewed in 1871. Becoming aware that Hamilton’s presentation of Reid was biased would be another factor. The second way of handling the matter is to deny any significant discontinuity. Despite some evidence, it is not obvious that the mature Peirce is closer to Reid’s philosophy than the young one, for two reasons. First, in the 1900s, Peirce still expresses some reluctance to endorse the views of ‘the old Scotch school’ (5.504). To be true, in accepting immediate beliefs, it provides a sound method to halt a recurrent and continuous questioning, and, in a word, safely prevents us from the slide into skepticism. But it does not mean that uncriticized beliefs should be *ipso facto* regarded as the very truth, contrary to what the historical common sense philosopher opined (5.505). In other words, Peirce insists that he has not become a blind supporter of Reid. The second reason is that the young Peirce probably underestimated the proximity of his own philosophy to Reid’s. To follow a suggestion by Claudine Tiercelin, it is likely ‘that there are more points of agreement between the philosophers than Peirce himself would admit’. In particular, during the years when he is laughing at Reid’s small philosophical caliber, Peirce himself argues for the very Reidian idea that man has no faculty of intuition, that is, no cognition not determined by previous cognitions (but determined directly by the transcendental object, cf. W2.194). It is related to Helmholtz’s theory of unconscious inferences. (One of his favorite examples is the fact that the needle-points of the eye are much bigger than what we can perceive.) Such an inferential theory implies that every perception and every thought (every

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impression and every idea, Hume would say) is a consequence of a mental process and a semiotic interpretation of a previous perception or thought. In other words, there is no ‘first’, no initial sensation, no original perception that would link us to the thing ‘in itself’.

Inferentialism about perception seems to conflict with Reid’s direct realism, but it may not be the case. Peirce’s so-called anti-Cartesian texts of 1868–69 in many respects agree with some of Reid’s most fundamental theses. It has been shown\(^{10}\) that his anti-Cartesianism is also secretly, and maybe more profoundly, a struggle against Aristotle’s direct realism, the idea that there is nothing in-between us and the world. Such an opposition between Helmholtz, the great discoverer of unconscious inferences, and direct realism probably accounts for Peirce’s following remark: ‘That “English Common Sense”, for example, is thoroughly peripatetic’ (\(W6.168\)). But what Peirce still did not realize at the time, however, is that he would be progressively attracted by Aristotle’s position, or more precisely, that his denial of intuition and of the transcendental object was in fact a form of direct realism (despite the physiological unconscious process needed to get such perception). His late theory of direct perception (sometimes dubbed ‘peirception’ by Peircean scholars) is akin to Reid’s realism for, either inferential or not, the ‘percepts’ do not represent the world but they present it (hence the name ‘presentationism’, often used in the nineteenth century, chiefly after Hamilton). To seem red and to be red is the same (7.561). After clarifying his own position, Peirce would then understand that it entails almost no change that ‘We have the direct experience of things in themselves’ (6.95). The opponent is the “way of ideas” denounced by Reid, that is, the supposition of intermediate entities between the perceiver and the object of perception. The theory of immediate perception was accepted by both Reid and Kant, Peirce claims in 1905 (8.261), and ‘this doctrine of immediate perception is a corollary from the corollary of pragmaticism that the object perceived is the immediate object of the destined ultimate opinion’ (8.261).

It leads to other respects where Peirce and Reid concurred as early as the 1860s. Contrary to Descartes’ advice, ‘We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy’ (W2.212). This is a point articulated in relation to a second Reidian principle: ‘to make single individuals absolute judges of truth is most pernicious’ (W2.212). Reid does not ask us to rely on our

\(^{10}\) Claudine Tiercelin, La Pensée-signe (Nîmes, 1993), 60–1.
own thoughts, but on common beliefs, shared by all mankind. ‘We individually cannot reasonably hope to attain the ultimate philosophy which we pursue; we can only seek it, therefore, for the community of philosophers’, Peirce echoes (W2.212). Another point where Peirce (unconsciously) meets Reid is the faith in a scientific method, and the ‘conviction that the methods of science must, some time or other, meet real laws and the agreement of the community’. Epistemological anti-individualism and the criticism of ‘paper doubts’ (Peirce) or ‘chamber doubts’ (Reid) make them allies.

It thus becomes slightly clearer why pragmatism and common-sensism (in its critical version) are logically related. They share a common view of knowledge as a set of fixed beliefs on which all agree and which preserve us from doubts, therefore facilitating practice and action. The pragmatist maxim announces that the signification of a concept is the whole of its practical possible consequences. Then, if the substance of his thought consists in a conditional resolve, the pragmaticist

will be of all men the man whose mind is most open to conviction, and will be keen up the scent of whatever can go toward teaching him to distinguish accurately between truth and falsity, probability and improbability. This will suffice to make the pragmaticist attentive to all those matters of every-day facts which critical common-sensism takes into account. (5.499)

Far from applying the method of tenacity, the common-sensist is now regarded as someone paying attention to common, daily observations. It seems that Peirce plays on the various meanings of the adjective, both referring to the community and to the normality of both the facts and the exercise of our powers.

**Criticism and Doubt**

Peirce’s synthesis tends to show that in making use of his sensus communis the Reidian already exerts some (proto)critical ability. But it is not enough: there is an ethical command to critically examine every belief of one’s own. One can wonder what difference it makes with Kant’s actual (if not avowed)

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11 Claudine Tiercelin, ‘Reid and Peirce on Belief’, 217.
method, namely, not a transcendental but a psychological examination. Since Peirce blames Kant for analyzing only our most common beliefs, should he be viewed not as a bad criticist but as a good critical common-sensist? In fact, their attitudes toward common-sense differ in the method of analysis. It does not consist, according to pragmaticism, in voluntarily doubting our beliefs, but in considering whether it would be possible to doubt them or not, and even more simply, in wondering whether one actually doubts them or not:

a philosopher ought not to regard an important proposition as indubitable without a systematic and arduous endeavour to attain to a doubt of it, remembering that genuine doubt cannot be created by a mere effort of will, but must be compassed through experience. (5.498)

Indeed, Peirce argues, we do not have an infallible introspective faculty of immediately being aware of what we believe and what we doubt (5.498). Peirce has been struggling against such a transparency principle since his first years as a philosopher. Thus, the critical part of Critical Common-Sensism is but ‘the systematic business of endeavoring to bring all [one’s] very general first premisses to recognition, and of developing every suspicion of doubt of their truth, by the use of logical analysis, and by experimenting in imagination’ (5.517). A powerful logic and a method of mental experimentation (Peirce’s phaneroscopy, which may remind of Husserl’s eidetic variations) are the tools whose necessity Kant failed to recognize.

If Scottish common sense refused to introduce such a critical part in its method, it is partly due to the history of its birth: it was mainly constituted to reply to the damaging consequences of Hume’s (supposed) skepticism. Reid shows the necessity of taking for granted some beliefs which, as the skeptic rightly emphasizes, are not properly justified. Some of our beliefs can neither be doubted nor justified; so let us believe them anyway, since it is a fact that we do have them. However, one of the main differences between Peirce’s and Reid’s theory is that pragmaticism acknowledges that there is a greater risk than skepticism. Worse than believing too little is the risk of believing too much:

while it may be disastrous to science for those who pursue it to think they doubt what they really believe, and still more so really to doubt what they ought to believe, yet, on the whole, neither of these is so unfavorable to science as for men of science to believe what they ought
to doubt, nor even for them to think they believe what they really doubt. (5.498)

In this regard, Peirce strongly dissents from the views of William James, whose ‘will to believe’ admonishes us to maximize our set of beliefs. As a consequence, the nature of our most ‘natural’ beliefs (Kant’s a priori principles, which Peirce reinterprets as innate ideas) entails a dilemma each horn of which he is obliged to refuse: either to admit unjustified beliefs (which his ‘will to know’ and attempt to ascertain truth cannot accept) or to doubt at will, in an insincere manner. At least one element is missing, however, to allow us to understand how he escaped the dilemma, which is presented in the next section.

The Anthropological Frame

The remaining task is to explain why Peirce can converge towards Reid’s acceptance of natural beliefs, and in the same move, how it can be combined with a critical approach. My hypothesis is that the (qualified) shift from anti- to moderate common-sensism (so to speak) can be ascribed to a general tendency toward naturalization in Peirce’s epistemology. Peirce’s early dismissal of the psychological base in Reid’s epistemology comes with the idea that man is most of the time ‘abnormal’ in employing his mental faculties. Were he not so, the common-sensist would be perfectly right in trusting the causal authority of things in their effect upon us. That is why, notwithstanding his dispraise of Reid, the young Peirce recognized: ‘The common-sense doctrine is to be held as far as this goes,—that there are no fallacies. Prove that a given belief really arises from certain data universal to all mankind and it must be admitted’ (W1.339). If there were no visual illusions for instance, that is, if our eyes and our interpreting brain were perfectly reliable in every case, then we would be justified in trusting our direct sensitive experience. (This is not Reid’s position, who never claims that our common sense beliefs are justified, but rather that we can and should hold them even if not justified.) Peirce’s view of common sense is fundamentally related to a normative approach: Reid’s theory (as well as Kant’s) is unsatisfactory, he believes, because it conflates facts (our opinions) with norms (knowledge). But if norms were naturally instantiated in facts, that is, if normative cases were the ‘normal’ cases, then Reid would be right. Common sense relies on the implicit premiss that our senses and
faculties are trustworthy. As a reliabilism, it relies too much on internal justification, whereas some form of evidentialism is needed. Reid’s list of first principles will ‘lack any epistemological bite’ if not embedded in an appropriate framework. But it is far from sure that Reid’s psychological, internalist reliabilism (to put it in a paradoxical way) does the job. Hence, one can suspect that Peirce’s (apparent) change of attitude toward Reid corresponds to an (apparent) evolution of his conception of epistemic norms.

Paradoxically, Reid’s principles are too naturalistic for an epistemological account, while Peirce’s notion of belief, less logical and more psychological as it seems, in fact allows a normative approach. For the only function of thought is to settle the opinions, that is, to produce satisfactory beliefs. Consequently, despite the psychological and hedonistic appearance of this theory, it in fact reveals a strong criterion for a good belief: it is a disposition to be satisfied by a proposition (whereas doubt is ‘a state of mind marked by a feeling of uneasiness’ (5.510)). ‘The feeling’, Peirce writes, ‘does and ought to vary with the chance of the believed thing, such as deduced from all the arguments’ (W3.293). The creed ought to be proportional to the weight of evidence. Thus, the opposition of belief and doubt creates a normative space, a place for what ought to be. In brief, whereas Reid’s set of fundamental principles or axioms just describes what is common to every healthy man and woman, Peirce’s common beliefs prescribe a quest for truth, a revision and a fixation of satisfying creeds.

Peirce’s notions of common sense and of revision of beliefs are not antagonistic to one another. They both delineate a set of beliefs that one cannot revoke in doubt. As Peirce puts it: ‘To say that I hold that the import, or adequate ultimate interpretation, of a concept is contained, not in any deed or deeds that will ever be done, but in a habit of conduct, or general moral determination of whatever procedure there may come to be, is no more than to say that I am a pragmaticist’ (5.504). Thus, since a belief is a habit, such

12 Compare Reid’s analysis of the reliability of memory: although we cannot prove that it is reliable in a non-circular way, it would be foolish to consider that our memories do not reflect past facts; see, Derek Brookes (ed.), Thomas Reid, Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man (Pennsylvania, 2002), 6.5, 474).

13 Reid’s position can thus be identified with a form of reliabilism, where our natural beliefs are in fact justified by the fact that we soundly produce them, similar to the view of Alvin Goldman, Epistemology and Cognition (Cambridge, 1986); see also, Philip De Bary, Thomas Reid and Scepticism: His Reliabilist Response (London, 2002).

14 Philip De Bary, Thomas Reid and Scepticism, 65.
indubitable beliefs refer to habits which are constitutive of our species, for they are anchored in us, so to speak. Peirce interprets the ‘indubitables’, the fundamental presumptions or presuppositions, as innate beliefs or instincts:

Now every animal must have habits. Consequently, it must have innate habits. In so far as it has cognitive powers, it must have in posse innate cognitive habits, which is all that anybody but John Locke ever meant by innate ideas. To say that I hold this for true is implied in my confession of the doctrine of Common-Sense. (5.504)

The relation to pragmatism then becomes obvious: if ‘it is the essence of pragmaticism to make existence to consist in action’ (MS 280), then one has to trust the natural precepts of practice. The ultimate interpretation of a concept is in a habit of conduct, which is always partly innate (as for instance in the animals): such a faith in innate and instinctive beliefs and habits commits to common sense. Another way of putting it is to say that both Peirce and Reid considered signs in nature on a par with conventional signs: as Richard Smyth notices, ‘Reid vastly extended the notion of testimony to include “original testimonies” given “in the natural language of the human countenance and behavior”’.15 However, whereas Reid’s principles are fundamental in the sense that they are original and universal, Peirce’s beliefs are original, therefore not universal. They refer to a kind of instinct in given circumstances. Thus ‘the indubitable beliefs refer to a somewhat primitive mode of life’ (5.511), and concern matters within the purview of the primitive man. In the course of human progress, some previously indubitable beliefs can become subject to a sound doubt. Indubitability is not forever, a fact that Reid did not realize: ‘In other words, we outgrow the applicability of instinct—not altogether, by any manner of means, but in our highest activities. The famous Scotch philosophers lived and died out before this could be duly appreciated’. (5.511)

Evolution really is the solution to the dilemma between unjustified beliefs and impossible doubts, and Darwin (or rather Lamarck) the key to the tension between Reid and Kant. Peirce’s great idea is that indubitable beliefs emerge: since a belief is that which resolves the tension of doubt, it is a product of evolution. Hence, ‘Common-sensism has to grapple with the difficulty that if there are any indubitable beliefs, these beliefs must have grown up; and during the process, cannot have been indubitable beliefs’ (5.512). Such a difficulty is

15 Richard Smyth, Reading Peirce Reading (Lanham, 1997), 100.
precisely what the theory of critical common sense accounts for. Contrary to common sense principles, the idea of a common sense belief implies the possibility of a change. It gives an argument for fallibilism, that is, the principle that anybody at any time can be mistaken, so that certainty never implies truth. The fallibilist ‘quite acknowledges that what has been indubitable one day has often been proved on the morrow to be false’ (5.514). In consequence, since not to doubt sincerely is not to doubt, it is sometimes impossible to doubt about propositions which in fact are wrong: ‘that while it is possible that propositions that really are indubitable, for the time being, should nevertheless be false, yet in so far as we do not doubt a proposition we cannot but regard it as perfectly true and perfectly certain’ (5.499).

Such a process also somehow accounts for the emergence of normativity itself, in paralleling the development of reason out of irrational thought through what Peirce calls self-control: a continuous series of self-criticisms and self-correcting mechanisms progressively creates the consciousness of the true/false dichotomy, which is the basis of normative thought and rational behavior. Nevertheless, the parallel should not be pushed too far. For if, contrary to what Reid thought, there is no fixed list of permanent principles of common-sense, neither do they vary in the course of a sole life. Peirce would probably agree that ‘Most men continue all their days to be just what Nature and human education made them. Their manners, their opinions, their virtues, and their vices, are all got by habit, imitation, and instruction; and reason has little or no share in forming them’. 16 It would be tempting, though, to grant to reason a most prominent place in the development of every individual. Hence Peirce’s confession:

a variety of Common-sensism which has always strongly attracted me, namely, that there is no definite and fixed collection of opinions that are indubitable, but that criticism gradually pushes back each individual’s indubitables, modifying the list, yet still leaving him beliefs indubitable at the time being. (5.509)

Unfortunately, Reid’s view sticks closer to reality: the evolution of common sense takes place at the scale of mankind and not of individual life. Indubitable beliefs vary a little and but a little under varying circumstances and in distant ages.

16 Thomas Reid, An Inquiry into the Human Mind, chapter 6, §24, 201.
The reason I have of late given up that opinion, attractive as I find it, is that the facts of my experience accord better with the theory of a fixed list, the same for all men. I do not suppose that it is absolutely fixed, (for my synechism would revolt at that) but that it is so nearly so, that for ordinary purposes it may be taken as quite so. (5.498)

Such ‘facts of experience’ are in fact, Peirce adds at more than sixty-five, the results of ‘some studies preparatory to an investigation of the rapidity of these changes’, that he wants to resume in order ‘to go to the bottom of the subject’ (5.444). It gives an idea of how central the matter appeared to him: it opens the path to an epistemology of the revision of beliefs at the scale of species. Peirce eventually confesses to own his adhesion, ‘under inevitable modification, to the opinion of that subtle but well-balanced intellect, Thomas Reid, in the matter of Common Sense’ (5.444).

Such a kind of moving fixity of beliefs has a name: vagueness. Every doubt bears on something definite, but what is doubted about this thing is vague (W3.61). It is a fundamental feature of Peirce’s common-sensism as opposed to Reid’s. Reid did not see that the indubitable needs to be vague. It is vagueness which gives doubt life (W3.23). A belief is a habit, and a habit begins to be ‘vague, special and meager’ before getting precise (W4.164). Once it is precise, it is no longer indubitable. Common beliefs are intrinsically vague: ‘they are very vague indeed (such as, that fire burns) without being perfectly so’ (5.498). Indeed, ‘fire burns’ is absolutely true as long as it remains vague, that is, not determinate according to various precise circumstances (fire does not burn in water, or without oxygen, fire does not burn diamond, and so on). ‘All the veritably indubitable beliefs are vague’ (5.505). That is why indubitable creeds cannot rely on science, for science itself lies on the logical principles that are to be warranted. There is reached the limits of inquiry. For the philosopher cannot investigate in his own indubitable beliefs: the fact of some universal presuppositions is an object of genuine inquiry, not their matter, ‘[b]ecause an investigation of such themes would be question-begging and not, as Peirce sometimes says, because of the psychological fact that no lively doubt propels the investigation onwards’. However, saying that science stops where instinct starts, in our common sense, is not even exact, because the very roots of the scientific method are not different: ‘those vague beliefs that appear to

be indubitable have the same sort of basis as scientific results have. That is to say, they rest on experience—on the total everyday experience of many generations of multitudinous populations’ (5.522). Such a vision completes the circle of Peirce’s natural epistemology.

I would like to end this study with some socio-historical remarks that are worth keeping in mind regarding Scottish thought in America. It has been shown that when groping for a national spirit both independent from Europe and from England, the USA turned toward the Scottish tradition of Enlightenment. It may not be stranger to Peirce’s insistence on a supposed family resemblance between John Duns, the so-called ‘Scotus’, and Thomas Reid, however artificial such an association actually is, as if there were a Scottish turn of mind immune to most traps of nominalism. Such a confidence in Scottish thought was of course far from a personal invention of Peirce’s, but rather a national duty. It is enough to recall that the famous 1776 pamphlet by Thomas Paine that advocated the independence of America from the United Kingdom, a symbol for the unity of the new nation, was titled *Common Sense*. One could even suspect it may have played a part in Peirce’s early contempt toward Reid’s small ‘caliber’: could the young, mischievous and often impertinent Charles, have accepted the dull official doctrine of Harvard teachers? His mind was too highly preoccupied by investigations in the theory of categories to understand that a corrected epistemology based on common sense could help him develop his metaphysic. In the universities, the basic teaching material was often provided by Scottish philosophy, which was extremely widespread on the East Coast. Francis Bowen, once Peirce’s logic professor at Harvard and his colleague when Peirce taught a class on ‘British logicians’, was an official adversary to Kant and a promoter of Hamilton’s ideas. Several presidents of universities (most famously John Witherspoon and Samuel Stanhope Smith at the soon-to-be Princeton University) tried to establish Reid’s thought as one major influence in North America. Peirce’s difficulties with the institution may explain his reluctance to adopt such a model. But on the other hand he quickly guessed the fruitfulness of some intuitions of common sense, for instance in a Scottish writer he quoted when he was fifteen, and which has Peirce’s biographer write: ‘The general origins of pragmatism in the popular common-sensism of Henry Home, Lord Kames, seem clear’. The elements of ambivalence could be listed again and again. It can for instance be related to the Concord writers. ‘One offshoot of Scottish common sense philosophy

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18 Brent, Charles Sanders Peirce, 51–2.
at Harvard was the rise of New England Transcendentalism. (…) Emerson in particular seems to have been influenced by Reid and Stewart’.\footnote{Benjamin Redekop, ‘Reid’s Influence in Britain, Germany, France, and America’, in Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg (eds), The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid (Cambridge, 2004), 332.} As Peirce treated Emerson with a mixture of diffidence and respect, almost sarcastic but in any case admiring, he may have been both intrigued and embarrassed with Reid’s principles of common sense and direct realism.

However, those factors mostly form the intellectual frame in which Peirce’s thought would have to develop: if different, Peirce would probably have found different means to realize the same project, the founding of an epistemology overcoming the idealist versus realist dichotomy—that is, an approach enabling us to fix beliefs both on nature and on the mind. Kant’s transcendental overcoming being in fact ignorant of its own epistemological presuppositions, the solution was in the clarifying and accepting such presuppositions: such is common sense, and such is pragmatism. These actually were seen as two alternatives for a national philosophy in America. But Peirce’s pragmatism was really a kind of revival of Scottish philosophy. So the debate was over what kind of revival it should be. Peirce very much relied on Alexander Bain’s theory of belief, of which he said pragmatism was ‘scarce more than a corollary’ (5.12). But Bain regarded himself as a rival to James McCosh, the president of Princeton University, as his autobiography shows. Strikingly, nevertheless, it seems that despite the apparent rivalries, their intellectual projects were quite similar, in realizing a fusion of Reid’s common sense and Kant’s criticism. That is why I think the now traditional view that Peirce was ‘the first writer in America to begin tolling the death knoll of the “old” psychology as the psychology of Porter and McCosh was later to be called’,\footnote{Thomas Cadwallader, ‘Peirce as an Experimental Psychologist’, Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society 11:3 (1975), 171.} should be qualified, if not challenged.\footnote{Cf. Grant R. Brodrecht, The Scottish Common Sense Tradition And Pragmatism: The Thought of James McCosh And Charles Sanders Peirce Compared, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, M.A. 2000.}

To some extent, McCosh regards Kant and Reid as very close:

Both appeal to reason, which Reid called reason in the first degree, and the other pure reason. The one presents this reason to us under the name of common sense that is, the powers of intelligence common to all men; the other, as principles necessary and universal. The one...
pointed to laws, native and fundamental; the other, to forms in the mind. The one carefully observed these by consciousness, and sought to unfold their nature; the other determined their existence by a criticism, and professes to give an inventory of them. All students should note these agreements as confirmatory of the truth in both.\(^{22}\)

He even almost sketches the doctrine of critical common sense when noticing that, ‘Pure reason, according to Kant, can criticise itself. But every criticism ought to have some principles on which it proceeds’. That is, as Peirce would say, criticism without common sense principles to be criticized is criticism of nothing. Unfortunately, McCosh was too confident in traditional logic, which is a reproach Peirce made of Kant as well, and adds: ‘Kant, a professor of Logic, fortunately adopted the forms of Logic which I can show had been carefully inducted by Aristotle, and hence has reached much truth’.\(^{23}\) Peirce’s work in logic is the proper demonstration that such a conception is completely wrong. McCosh later blamed Sidgwick for robbing him of his title,\(^{24}\) but Sidgwick did more: he went one step further than McCosh had dared. In joining both Reid and Kant, philosophy can be considered as ‘a means for criticizing and changing common sense beliefs’.\(^{25}\) Sidgwick concluded that ‘the premisses of Criticism, as far as we have yet examined them, are illegitimately and inconsistently assumed’. For him, Kant pretends to rely on common sense,\(^{26}\) whereas Peirce argues to the contrary that Kant pretends to go beyond common sense through transcendental deduction. But he of course does not, and uses some more sophisticated reasoning.\(^{27}\) Thus, pragmatism and American Scottish thought have a lot in common,\(^{28}\) and in particular they both endeavoured to give America a ‘national’ philosophy. But whereas


\(^{23}\) Ibid., 339.


\(^{26}\) ‘But how impossible it is for Kant to appeal to Common Sense with any consistency, appears more manifestly when we ask what he means by the “experience” that verifies the universals of physical science; since there is at any rate no doubt that his view of it is fundamentally different from the common sense view of the plain man’; Henry Sidgwick, ‘A Criticism of the Critical Philosophy’, \textit{Mind}, 8 (1883), 82.

\(^{27}\) ‘Can we suppose that Kant (…) relies not strictly on induction from experience, but on Common Sense uncontradicted by experience?'; Ibid., 81.

\(^{28}\) Probably much more than with Chauncey Wright, one of Peirce’s very good friends, who was very critical towards McCosh; see ‘McCosh on Intuitions’ and ‘McCosh on Tyndall’.
McCosh intended to bring Reid’s ideas to a new fruition, Peirce thought that ‘the Scotch school of philosophy (...) is too old a tree to bear good fruit’ (W2.278). If Peirce’s position seems to remain ambiguous, it is because one cannot understand it without plunging into its logical and metaphysical roots.

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Over the past thirty years one of the most fertile areas of growth in academe has been the interdisciplinary field known as ‘the history of the book’. For at least some of the early pioneers of the field like Robert Darnton, the study of the history of the book was conceived of as a bridge between traditional forms of intellectual history and the then new ‘social history of ideas’. But as book history has developed since the 1980s scholars have been less concerned with rewriting the history of ideas than they have with exploring the various elements of Darnton’s influential model of the ‘communications circuit’ between author and reader. Because of the current taste for the genre of biography, individual authors have garnered a good deal of attention, as have the social, economic, and legal structures that conditioned the emergence of ‘the author’ in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The careers and the roles played by publishers and booksellers in the communications circuit have likewise been scrutinized. So too has the book as a physical object and a cultural signifier. The study of readers has also expanded dramatically. Historians of reading have investigated a bewildering number of topics and, in doing so, have proposed a number of controversial theses regarding putative revolutions in modes of reading in pre-modern Europe involving shifts from communal to private, oral to silent, and intensive to extensive reading. If anything, the array of scholarship on reading signals a high degree of fragmentation within book history, for studies of reading range across such diverse subjects as literacy, the readerships for specific genres of books, annotations and marginalia, methods of note taking, geographies of reading, the politics of reading, theories of reading, and the social profile of readers. Perhaps more than any other

1 Robert Darnton first linked intellectual history with the history of the book in his influential review article, ‘The Social History of Ideas’, which was initially published in 1971 and subsequently reprinted in his The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History (New York and London, 1990), 219–52.

2 Robert Darnton, ‘What is the History of Books?’, in The Kiss of Lamourette, 107–35; this essay was first published in 1982.

3 This fragmentation was in evidence by the mid-1990s. See the comments in Anthony Grafton, ‘Is the History of Reading a Marginal Enterprise? Guillaume Budé and His
facet of the history of the book, work on reading mirrors the trajectory of
neighboring disciplines like literature and history insofar as traditional notions
of the canon have been abandoned and the search for the archetypal ‘common
reader’ has been replaced by the reconstruction of difference marked by class,
gender, and race. And for some scholars such as Roger Chartier the history of
reading now forms the core of a new configuration of knowledge that both
subsumes and supersedes what was once known as ‘the history of the book’.

Despite the recent reorientation of research within the history of the
book, book historians have nevertheless greatly enriched our knowledge of
Enlightenment in the Atlantic world. Well before the history of the book
coalesced as a discipline, Daniel Mornet laid the foundations for an analysis
of the relationship between Enlightenment political ideas and the French
Revolution through his study of eighteenth-century private libraries. Robert
Darnton was among the first to take up Mornet’s problematic in a series
of highly influential books and articles on the communications circuit in
eighteenth-century France, and his use of book history to understand the
social and cultural contours of Enlightenment has been widely emulated.

Due partly to the strong native tradition of bibliophilia and bibliography, the
history of the book in Scotland has flourished over the past three decades,

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4 Some sense of how the study of reading has changed since the 1980s can be gained
by comparing Darnton’s ‘First Steps toward a History of Reading’, in The Kiss of
History 7 (2004): 303–20. One leading scholar claimed that a ‘new’ history of reading
emerged in the 1980s that was characterized by questions regarding ‘not merely
the what, but the how, or process of reading. We have come to realize that modes
of using and understanding print changed over time’; David D. Hall, ‘The History
27–38, on 30. For a more recent (and lucid) overview of the literature on the history
of reading see Stephen Colelough, Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities,

5 Roger Chartier, ‘Frenchness in the History of the Book: From the History of
Publishing to the History of Reading’, Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society,
Jonathan Rose likewise identifies the history of reading with ‘“new” book history’ in
his ‘Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences’,

6 Daniel Mornet, Les origines de la Révolution Française, 1715–1787 (Paris, 1933).

7 See especially Darnton’s The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the
Encyclopédie, 1775–1800 (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1979), and his The Literary
Underground of the Old Regime (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1982), as well as a
number of the essays collected together in The Kiss of Lamourette.
much to the benefit of those interested in the Scottish Enlightenment. Publishers, printers, and booksellers have attracted the most attention and, thanks to the research done thus far on the production and distribution of books by Scottish authors, we know a good deal about the diffusion of the intellectual achievements of the Scottish Enlightenment across the Atlantic world. By contrast with the book trade, however, authorship in eighteenth-century Scotland has not as yet been the subject of systematic study and no one has framed the career of any of the leading Scottish literati in terms of print culture as Justin Champion has recently done with the Anglo-Irish Deist John Toland. Various aspects of the history of reading have also been investigated, including literacy, student marginalia, and especially libraries, whereas the responses of individual Scottish readers remains a relatively under-explored topic. Reader response is, of course, a notoriously difficult

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subject to examine because direct evidence about how and what historical actors read is more often than not lacking, but there is little reason why we should know less about reading in eighteenth-century Scotland than elsewhere, given the rich archival and print resources available.\(^{12}\) To illustrate this point I focus in what follows on Thomas Reid, who was one of the major figures of the Scottish Enlightenment and of the Enlightenment of the Atlantic world more generally. Reid’s surviving papers and other related materials provide us with an exceptionally detailed portrait of his reading habits and practices, a hitherto unexplored facet of his life which sheds significant new light on the question of his intellectual identity. Moreover, my discussion of Reid serves to widen the range of case studies illustrating the diversity of forms of reading in early modern Britain. For whereas previous work on the subject has mapped the diverse reading practices of men and women from different social ranks who can be seen as ‘common’ readers, comparatively little has been said about learned academic readers like Reid who were directly involved in the propagation of Enlightenment.\(^{13}\)


\(^{13}\) Perhaps the closest parallel to Reid discussed in the literature is Samuel Johnson, who stands as an exemplar of a prominent man of letters. On Johnson as a reader see Robert DeMaria Jr., *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Reading* (Baltimore and London,
I begin by enumerating the different forms of reading that Thomas Reid engaged in during his lifetime. The first was individual reading. Inasmuch as one can say that there is a master narrative about the history of reading, one component of this narrative has been the supposed shift over time from collective to so-called ‘solitary’ or ‘private reading’.14 When we consider the evidence we have about Reid’s reading practices, however, the terms ‘solitary’ or ‘private’ do not straightforwardly apply to the changing circumstances of his career nor do they entirely capture the quotidian realities of his life. As a young man Reid may have had relatively private spaces in which to read, although he may have had to share rooms as a student at Marischal College Aberdeen. He probably had a room to himself as a boarder in the 1730s and when he first moved to the manse at New Machar in 1737.15 But once he married his cousin Elizabeth in August 1740 and became a father in 1742, it is unlikely that he would have had his own study or another private room. From 1751 to 1764, while he was a regent at King’s College, his family grew in size.16 Domestic space was therefore likely at a premium, as it evidently


15 On student accommodation at the two Aberdeen colleges at the turn of the eighteenth century see Colin A. McLaren, Aberdeen Students, 1600–1860 (Aberdeen, 2005), 60–1. The address on the first extant letter to Reid shows that he took lodgings ‘at Mrs Dean’s in the School hill’; James Darling to Thomas Reid, 8 January 1736, in Thomas Reid, The Correspondence of Thomas Reid, ed. Paul Wood (Edinburgh, 2002), 3. No evidence survives regarding the physical layout of the manse that Reid (and later his family) lived in.

16 According to A. Campbell Fraser, Reid and his family rented the Canonist’s Manse from the College; Fraser, Thomas Reid (Edinburgh and London, 1898), 44. The King’s College account books are difficult to decipher, but they suggest that Reid did indeed rent the Canonist’s Manse; see ‘Procuration Accounts, 1751–1752’ and ‘Procuration...
was after their move to Glasgow in the summer of 1764. Writing to his friend Dr. Andrew Skene, Reid said of their new tenement flat in the Drygate that ‘You walk upstairs to a neat little dining room & find as many other little Rooms as just accomodate my family so scantily that my appartment is a closet of 6 foot by 8 or 9 off the dining room’. The evidence we have regarding room use in eighteenth-century Glasgow suggests that his ‘appartment’ functioned as a space where he slept as well as a working space where he kept books and papers. By the autumn of 1766 the Reids had left their rented accommodation in the Drygate and taken up residence in the Professors’ Court at the College. Begun in the 1720s, the Professor’s Court was bounded on three sides by what Thomas Pennant subsequently described as ‘good houses’ for the professoriate. Unfortunately we do not know which of the houses the Reids were initially assigned or whether Reid had his own room. It is reasonable to assume that as the family gradually shrank through the 1770s and 1780s, he was finally able to have a study exclusively to himself, although it is possible that the Reids took in boarders to increase their income. After his retirement from teaching he certainly needed a room of his own to store his personal papers, as well as his modest library of over 70 volumes. For most of Reid’s life, therefore, his individual

Accounts, 1752–1753’, Aberdeen University Library, MS K 57/29 and 57/30. See also Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/7/III/12, fol. 2v, where Reid notes that he had established through observation the latitude of the Canonist’s Manse. Three sons were born while the Reids lived in Old Aberdeen: George (1755), Lewis (1756), and David (1762). Lewis died in 1758.

Reid to Skene, 14 November 1764, in Reid, Correspondence, 37.

Stana Nenadic, ‘The Middle Ranks and Modernisation’, in Glasgow, Volume I: Beginnings to 1830, ed. T. M. Devine and Gordon Jackson (Manchester and New York, 1995), 285–91. The dining room Reid mentions would have functioned as a public reception room and could conceivably have held some of his books.

Thomas Pennant, A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides 1772, ed. Andrew Simmons (Edinburgh, 1998), 132. For details of the Professors’ Court see David Murray, Memories of the Old College of Glasgow: Some Chapters in the History of the University (Glasgow,, 1927), 368–75.

At the end of his life, Reid was living in house no. 7 in New Court and he asserted his right to house no. 11 after the death of John Anderson: ‘Minutes of Faculty Meetings, 1794–1800’, Glasgow University Archive Services, GUA 26695, 86–7.

We know that Reid owned at least 70 volumes because at some point before 1796 he told his daughter Martha that ‘such of his Books as the College might choose, should be given to the Publick Library’ at his death. His instructions were followed and by February 1797 Patrick Wilson, George Jardine, and Archibald Arthur had selected ‘Seventy Volumes and upwards’ for the University library; ‘Minutes of Senate Meetings, 1787–1802’, Glasgow University Archive Services, SEN 1/1/2, 236 (entry for 22 February 1797). The list of books drawn up by Wilson and his colleagues has
reading in a domestic setting was neither entirely private nor solitary in the senses in which we currently understand these terms. Rather, his reading was largely carried out in the midst of the bustle of the home and not in the scholarly seclusion of a space solely dedicated to the realm of the mind.

Another element in the master narrative of the history of reading is the relationship between oral and silent reading, with the former associated with reading in groups and the latter the encounter between individuals and texts. In Reid’s case, it would seem that these two forms of reading were not mutually exclusive. By 1785 at the latest Reid was suffering from deafness. In September of that year his kinsman Dr. James Gregory enquired about his ‘distemper’ and he replied that ‘the more I walk, or ride, or even talk or read audibly, I am the better’.22 There is thus some evidence that Reid read aloud to himself (and perhaps to others in the family), although it is unlikely that he did so on a routine basis.

A third component of the master narrative of the history of reading is the controversial distinction between intensive and extensive reading habits first proposed by Rolf Engelsing. According to Engelsing, until the mid-eighteenth century individuals read intensively, that is, they owned only a few books (like the Bible) which they continuously re-read, typically aloud and in a group setting, so that the readers and their hearers came to know the texts more or less by heart. But then a revolution in reading habits occurred in the latter part of the eighteenth century, prompted in part by the spread of newspapers and the rise of the periodical press. Those who could read now did so extensively: instead of being closely familiar with a small number of works, readers consumed a wide range of newspaper and journal articles, novels, and other printed materials which they read through once before turning their attention to new texts.23 Engelsing’s thesis has attracted a good

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22 Reid to Gregory, 23 September 1785, in Reid, Correspondence, 179.
deal of criticism, not least because intensive and extensive forms of reading seem to be complementary modes of interacting with the printed word rather than distinct temporal stages in the history of reading. Nor does Englesing’s distinction capture key features of scholarly reading habits, insofar as the ideals of erudition and learning imply a combination of close attention to the details of texts with a knowledge of a wide array of writings. In Reid’s case, his experience as a reader encompassed both intensive and extensive reading. Like the vast majority of his literate contemporaries, Reid was an intensive reader of the Bible and perhaps also of some classical and modern literature, whereas he was also an extensive reader of newspapers, journals, literary works, and at least some scholarly texts. Rather than showing Reid to be a transitional figure caught up in a reading revolution, as Englesing would have it, the evidence we have about Reid’s use of print suggests that eighteenth-century readers habitually combined intensive and extensive modes of reading and that the kind of reading that they engaged in was to some extent dependent upon the type of text involved.

As I have indicated, Reid also engaged in collective or communal reading and he did so in a number of different ways. It is almost certain that he would have read the Bible with his family, although we have no direct evidence to prove this, and it may be that he read to his children. Outside of the domestic sphere, we know that he read aloud in the company of friends. Being a man of candor, Joseph Priestley sent copies of his An Examination of Dr. Reid’s Inquiry… Dr. Beattie’s Essay… and Dr. Oswald’s Appeal… to Reid, James Beattie, and James Oswald when the book appeared in the autumn of 1774. Soon afterwards Henry Home, Lord Kames, informed the Edinburgh bookseller William Creech that ‘Dr Reid is here [at Blairdrummond] whom I employed to read passages out of Priestly for the amusement of us all. For my own part I never once cast an eye upon it’. A few years later, Priestley again figured in another instance of communal reading, this time with Reid’s colleague, the Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, John Anderson. While the College was out of session through the summer and

24 Evidence for Reid’s appetite for polite literature comes in a letter written by William Ogilvie to Lord Buchan in January 1764 transcribed in Buchan’s papers; see Glasgow University Library, MS 201/65.

25 Joseph Priestley, An Examination of Dr. Reid’s Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense, Dr. Beattie’s Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, and Dr. Oswald’s Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion (London, 1774), [iii]–v; Kames to Creech, 4 October 1774, National Archives of Scotland, Dalguise Muniments, GD38/2/19.
autumn of 1782 Anderson decamped to nearby Dumbarton, where he carried out a series of gunnery experiments at the Castle. Reid visited Anderson for a few days in late October and while they were together they read ‘the Review, McLeod on Patronage, Monboddo’s 3d Volumes Priestly &c.’ Reid can also be seen to have been a member of various communities of readers during the course of his life. One such community was made up of the circle of friends and associates who in 1736–7 participated in the Philosophical Club that probably met at Marischal College. Later, another community gradually emerged that centered on Reid, George Campbell, and Alexander Gerard. Made up of clergymen affiliated with the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland, this group shared a common reading of Hume which they promulgated during the 1750s and 1760s in a variety of contexts, including the Aberdeen Philosophical Society. But once Reid moved to Glasgow, his

26 ‘Dumbarton Castle’, Archives and Special Collections, Andersonian Library, University of Strathclyde, MS 33. The titles listed indicate that Reid and Anderson were reading: the *Monthly Review*, possibly the anonymous pamphlet *The Case of Patronage Stated, according to the Laws, Civil and Ecclesiastical, of the Realm of Scotland. By a Member of the Church of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1782), which may have been written by their colleague, the Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Hugh Macleod; the first three volumes or just the third of Lord Monboddo’s *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (Edinburgh, 1773–1776); and either or both of Priestley’s *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* (London, 1777) and *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity, in a Correspondence between Dr Price and Dr Priestley* (London, 1778). Another work that the two of them may have read was Priestley’s *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. (Birmingham, 1782). A second edition of Priestley’s *Disquisitions* was also published that year, although Reid never refers to this edition in his published or unpublished writings.


29 The New Machar parish records show that George Campbell served as a substitute preacher for Reid from 1746 to 1752. Alexander Gerard substituted for Reid in 1751–2; ‘The Session Register of the Parish of Newmachar Containing an account of the Sessional affairs from the Thirteenth of March Seventeen hunder [sic] and Seventeen years’, National Archives of Scotland, CH 2/281/3, 276, 277, 301, 317, 325, 326, 334, 339, 340, 343, 345, 346, 348.

30 That is, one way of thinking about the origins of common sense philosophy is to see the ideas of Reid, Campbell, and Gerard as growing out of a shared reading of Hume’s writings that was articulated in the late 1740s and early 1750s. Their ideas were expounded in sermons, lectures, and print. See Paul Wood, ‘David Hume on
letters to friends back in Aberdeen show that he felt himself to be somewhat isolated intellectually and it would seem that he was never able fully to recreate the close-knit communities of readers to which he belonged during his years in the North East.31

Collective oral reading was, in addition, central to Reid’s professional life. One form of this mode of reading in which he engaged was delivering sermons and ‘lectures’ on specific Biblical texts. Reid initially developed his skills as a preacher and an expositor of Scripture as a divinity student and then as a probationer and preacher in the presbytery of Kincardine O’Neil in the years 1726 to 1733. It was only after he became parish minister at New Machar, however, that he was obliged to give sermons and lectures on a regular basis. We know that Reid read to his parishioners published sermons by such English figures as the Latitudinarian John Tillotson and the Dissenter John Evans. In doing so, Reid followed an established practice of the day rather than displaying diffidence about his abilities as a stylist, as Dugald Stewart was the first to suggest.32 Unfortunately none of Reid’s own sermons or notes for sermons survive and hence we have no direct evidence about his preaching style. Reports of his performance in the pulpit differ, and the differences relate directly to the religious sensibilities of the reporters. Ramsay of Ochtertyre, a moderate Presbyterian who knew Reid personally, recorded that ‘from all I can collect, his style of preaching was far from being popular or alluring, being clear, plain, mathematical reasoning, little indebted to voice or action’.33 By contrast, James Mackinlay, an evangelical who was one of Reid’s students at Glasgow, recalled that Reid’s

earnestness at the dispensation of the Sacrament in the College Hall, at which he once presided, was never forgotten…In his address to the communicants, he seemed to pour out his whole soul; and while speaking of the dying love of Christ, tears were observed running down

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31 For Reid’s sense of intellectual isolation, specifically with reference to the study of pneumatology, see Reid to David Skene, [July 1770], in Reid, Correspondence, 63.
32 Dugald Stewart, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid, D. D. F. R. S. Edin. Late Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Glasgow (Edinburgh, 1803), 16–17.
his cheeks, showing the intensity of his inward emotion. Altogether, he was not only a great man, a patient, modest, and deep thinker, but a man in whom there appeared to be the fear and love of God.34

Reid’s surviving lecture notes on pulpit oratory indicate that Ramsay of Ochtertyre’s characterization of Reid’s preaching style was the more accurate one. While recognizing the need to ‘touch… the Human Heart’, Reid told his Glasgow students that the most important task of the preacher was to ‘enlighten the Understanding of his hearers’. Reid pointedly warned against the emotive style of preaching cultivated by the High Flyers in the Church of Scotland, and insisted on the value of ‘Perspicuity’ when writing and delivering a sermon. Reid’s Glasgow lectures on rhetoric, therefore, suggest that his oral reading from the pulpit was calculated to curb ‘Enthusiasm’ and promote ‘Rational Piety’ amongst his auditors.35

The second form of collective oral reading that Reid engaged in professionally for much of his adult life was lecturing in university classrooms. The best known description of Reid’s teaching style comes from Dugald Stewart, who attended his mentor’s moral philosophy lectures in the 1771–2 session.36 According to Stewart,

The merits of Dr Reid, as a public teacher, were derived chiefly from that rich fund of original and instructive philosophy which is to be found in his writings; and from his unwearied assiduity in inculcating principles which he conceived to be of essential importance to human happiness. In his elocution and mode of instruction, there was nothing peculiarly attractive. He seldom, if ever, indulged himself in the warmth of extempore discourse; nor was his manner of reading calculated to increase the effect of what he had committed to writing.

34 ‘Memoir of the Rev. James Mackinlay, D.D.’, in Rev. James Mackinlay, Select Sermons. With a Memoir by his Son; and Published under his Superintendence (Kilmarnock, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, 1843), 13. This passage may be the source for James McCosh’s statement: ‘the tradition is that, in dispensing the sacrament of the supper, tears rolled from his eyes, when he spoke of the loveliness of the Saviour’s character’; McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy, Biographical, Expository, Critical, from Hutcheson to Hamilton (London, 1875), 199. McCosh shared Mackinlay’s evangelicalism.
36 Stewart matriculated in John Anderson’s natural philosophy class; W. Innes Addison, The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow: From 1728 to 1858 (Glasgow, 1913), 95 (no. 3015).
Such, however, was the simplicity and perspicuity of his style; such the gravity and authority of his character; and such the general interest of his young hearers in the doctrines which he taught, that by the numerous audiences to which his instructions were addressed, he was heard uniformly with the most silent and respectful attention.37

Other accounts of Reid’s manner of lecturing in his public class likewise stressed his unvarnished mode of delivery. For the evangelical clergyman, Rev. William Thom of Govan, Reid was one of the Glasgow professors who were notorious for teaching ‘in a manner so dry and unentertaining that no epithet so proper and characteristic as that of drowsy could be applied to them’, and Thom compared their style of reading to ‘those old nurses who have the art of lulling children asleep’. Moreover, he also complained that ‘if I hear the lectures or read the books of [Adam Smith and Reid] with all the care I can, my heart is never affected by them: I feel no sort of emotion, nor any desire of virtue, nor even of knowledge’.38 A less jaundiced estimate of Reid’s plain style of reading lectures in his public class was given a few years later by Alexander Peters, who had studied under James Beattie at Marischal College Aberdeen.39 In the 1778–9 session Peters was acting as a tutor and, in addition to attending the logic, Greek, and Latin classes at Glasgow with his young charge, he took the opportunity to hear Reid. Writing to Beattie, Peters reported that ‘I have been several times in Dr Reid’s Class; his Lectures are extremely sensible and perspicuous; but his Language is unmusical, and his manner ungainly’.40

As for Reid’s private class (which he gave at noon three days a week), even less evidence survives regarding his style of delivery. His private

37 Stewart, Account, 50–1.
38 William Thom, ‘The Trial of a Student in the College of Clutha in the Kingdom of Oceana’, in The Works of the Rev. William Thom, Late Minister of Govan, Consisting of Sermons, Tracts, Letters, &c. &c. &c. (Glasgow, 1799), 404–5. This tract was first published in 1768 and was written in defense of the student David Woodburn, who was disciplined by the University of Glasgow in that year. Woodburn reportedly said that it was better to attend the theater than ‘the drowsie shops of Logic and Metaphysics’, that is, the classes of the Professor of Logic, James Clow, and Reid. The record of the proceedings survives in Glasgow University Archive Services, GUA 26682. See also Innes Addison, Matriculation Albums, 73 (no. 2306).
40 Alexander Peters to James Beattie, 8 December 1778, Aberdeen University Library MS 30/2/322.
pupils have apparently left no comment on his teaching practice, and the only clues we have come from his extant lecture notes, which imply that he may have included more extempore discussion of his material than he did in his public class.41 A slightly different form of collective reading, which is best described as ‘interactive’, took place in the hour Reid devoted daily to examining his students. An anecdote recorded by Reid’s friend and colleague, the Glasgow Professor of Logic and Rhetoric George Jardine, indicates that in the examination hour both he and his students read and discussed together Cicero’s De finibus and most likely a few other texts by classical moralists.42

What is most striking about the reading styles Reid apparently adopted in the Kirk and the classroom is the close similarity between them. We have seen that Reid himself valued ‘Perspicuity’ in pulpit oratory and Ramsay of Ochtertyre’s description of his sermons suggests that his own practice reflected his rhetorical principles. Furthermore, both Stewart and Peters agreed that Reid’s lectures were ‘perspicuous’ and otherwise owed little to the arts of the orator. But the seeming neutrality of Reid’s delivery in both the pulpit and the lecture hall exemplifies a style of reading that was enmeshed in contentious religious and philosophical disputes. From the 1730s onwards, religious life in Scotland was sharply divided because of the fissures created within the Church of Scotland by the issue of patronage. Reid had first-hand experience of the divisiveness of the politics of patronage early in life because his election at New Machar was opposed by the Rev. John Bisset, a Popular Party demagogue who stirred up hostility to Reid in the parish. From then on Reid aligned himself with moderate men in the Kirk, and both his own preaching and his treatment of pulpit oratory in his Glasgow lectures on rhetoric speak to a form of reading that was developed in opposition to that associated with the

41 Reid detailed his teaching routine in a letter to his friend Andrew Skene written shortly after his move to Glasgow; Reid to Skene, 14 November 1764, in Reid, Correspondence, 36. The fragmentary character of a number of Reid’s surviving notes for his private class indicate that he most likely lectured extempore on at least some topics and read fully prepared texts on others.

42 George Jardine, Outlines of Philosophical Education, Illustrated by the Method of Teaching the Logic Class in the University of Glasgow; Together with Observations on the Expediency of Extending the Practical System to Other Academical Establishments, and on the Propriety of Making Certain Additions to the Course of Philosophical Education in Universities. 2nd ed., enl. (Glasgow, 1825), 263–4. That Reid was reading Cicero with his students in the examination hour suggests that he followed the example of Adam Smith, whose teaching practice is recounted in William Richardson, ‘An Account of Some Particulars in the Life and Character of the Author’, in Rev. Archibald Arthur, Discourses on Theological and Literary Subjects (Glasgow, 1803), 507–8.
Popular Party. The divide between moderates and evangelicals was especially pronounced in Glasgow, and Reid’s affiliation with the Moderate Party partly explains why he was subsequently a target for William Thom.

Moreover, Thom’s criticism of Reid’s lectures also signals a disagreement over how moral philosophy was to be taught. Thom had studied under Reid’s predecessor Francis Hutcheson, and he greatly admired his teacher’s ‘magical power to inspire the noblest sentiments, and to warm the hearts of youth with the admiration and love of virtue’. Yet Thom was ambivalent about Hutcheson’s course because the value of his lectures on ethics and politics was compromised by wasting ‘three or four months a-year… on metaphysical and fruitless disputations’. That is, Thom approved of his teacher’s ‘Warmth in the Cause of Virtue’ and believed that academic moralists should focus on the inculcation of practical moral principles rather than on such ‘metaphysical’ topics as the science of the mind. Reid’s lecturing style in his public class, on the other hand, was the antithesis of Hutcheson’s. Whereas Hutcheson usually spoke extempore without notes and discoursed eloquently while walking about the classroom, Reid normally read the text of his lecture with little physical movement or variation of voice or gesture. To use David Hume’s terminology, Reid was the archetypal ‘anatomist’ of the mind who maintained that moral instruction had to be grounded on ‘accurate and abstruse’ philosophy. Hence the manner in which he read his lectures embodied a distinctive approach to the teaching of philosophy which differed markedly from that cultivated by Hutcheson. Reid’s style of oral reading may have been ‘perspicuous’ but it was by no means neutral or uncontroversial in the context of Enlightenment Scotland because it represented a rejection of the form of preaching common to members of the Popular Party in the Kirk and the kind of philosophical preaching popularized by Francis Hutcheson.

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45 Hume drew the contrast between the painter and the anatomist of the mind in his letter to Hutcheson cited in n. 42 above. See also David Hume, An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 1999), 88.
A third type of collective oral reading that Reid engaged in was the delivery of papers before the members of learned societies. This type of reading was also to some extent interactive, and it had a significant overlap with polite conversation. During the course of his life, Reid was a member of five such bodies that we know of: the Philosophical Club, the Aberdeen Philosophical Society, the Gordon’s Mill Farming Club, the Glasgow Literary Society, and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Of these five, he was only marginally involved in the Farming Club and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, whereas he was active in the two Aberdeen philosophical societies and the Glasgow group. It is reasonable to assume that meetings of the Philosophical Club were structured much like those of the Wise Club and the Literary Society; that is, one of the members probably read a paper which was then discussed and criticized by his fellow participants. In the Wise Club and the Literary Society, the members also formulated questions for debate at meetings. The Aberdeen Philosophical Society adopted the practice of having a member draw up a written summary of the discussion prompted by the question addressed which was subsequently read at a later meeting and incorporated into the Society’s records, whereas the convention within the Glasgow Literary Society was that a member would propose a question and read a formal paper on the topic which was then debated. This type of collective oral reading was thus firmly embedded in the context of polite, learned conversation amongst males. Moreover, the interaction stimulated by the texts read could, at times, become rather heated. The meetings of the Glasgow Literary Society were especially fractious (due in large part to university politics), and we know that Reid was occasionally embroiled in disputes with colleagues whom he otherwise counted as friends. Reid and John Millar are said to have engaged in ‘frequent debate’ over the cogency of Hume’s philosophy, and Millar’s biographer John Craig indicated that these exchanges sometimes degenerated into ‘acrimonious disputation’.

Reid also periodically fell out with John Anderson at the Society’s meetings. One episode is described by Alexander Peters. In late 1778 Scotland was deeply divided over Henry Dundas’ proposal to introduce legislation for the relief of Scottish Catholics, and this divisive issue was taken up in the Society amid

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anti-Catholic agitation in Glasgow.\textsuperscript{49} On 13 November the Society resolved that ‘in case Dr. Stevenson do not give his discourse next night Mr. Millar is to open his voluntary question viz. Is it expedient to give an unlimited Toleration to the Roman Catholic Religion in Britain’. Stevenson failed to produce his discourse the following week and the Society duly tackled Millar’s question. Peters recounted that

Dr. Reid maintained mildly, that the Repeal would be attended with no bad consequences, Mr. Anderson &c, that it would.—The Natural Philosopher compared the Papists to a Rattle-Snake, harmless when kept under proper restraints: but dangerous like it, when at full liberty; and ready to diffuse a baleful poison around.\textsuperscript{50}

In this highly charged debate it appears from Peters’s report that Reid echoed the position taken by the Moderate Party, whereas Anderson and his allies supported the ‘No Popery’ line of the Rev. John Erskine and those clergymen affiliated with the Popular Party. The Literary Society was thus as divided as Scottish society more generally over the question of relief for Scottish Catholics, which points to the fact that the type of collective oral reading that Reid performed in learned societies could be as politicized as the reading of sermons or lectures.

II

I want to return now to Reid’s individual reading and focus on the ways in which he engaged with the hand-written and printed word, that is, with manuscripts, books, pamphlets, and ephemera. First, we need to examine how Reid was able to gain access to the texts that he read during the course of his life. Given that both of Reid’s parents came from families who figured in the European republic of letters, it is reasonable to assume that there was at the very least a modest library at the manse when he was growing up in Strachan in rural Kincardineshire.\textsuperscript{51} After being sent by his parents to the nearby parish


\textsuperscript{50} ‘Laws of the Literary Society in Glasgow College’, Glasgow University Library, MS Murray 505, 73; Peters to James Beattie, 8 December 1778, Aberdeen University Library MS 30/2/322.

\textsuperscript{51} On his father’s side one of Reid’s ancestors was Thomas Reid (d. 1624), Latin Secretary
school at Kincardine O’Neil and, briefly, to the Aberdeen Grammar School, he entered Marischal College in 1722. Institutional libraries thus increased Reid’s access to books during his student years. Moreover his stint as Librarian at Marischal from 1733 to 1736 not only reinforced his ties to the college library and gave him free run of the collection but also introduced him to the problem of how best to order and catalogue books. Following his move to New Machar, he was presumably largely reliant on his own personal library, as well as the libraries of friends and associates like Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk, although the reading notes from works by Maupertuis and Pierre Bouguer on the shape of the earth that survive from this period suggest that he continued to use books from one of the college libraries in Aberdeen. While teaching at King’s College he again had an institutional library directly to hand, which may have been better stocked than its rival in the New Town. Friends and colleagues probably also continued to lend him books and one of his letters to Lord Kames indicates that manuscripts may have been circulating in the circles in which he moved in the North East. In addition, his personal

to James I (1618–24) and a notable benefactor to Marischal College. His mother Margaret was a member of the remarkable Gregory family which produced a long line of talented mathematicians and medics from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.

52 During Reid’s tenure as Librarian he worked on a new shelf catalogue for the college library; Iain Beavan, ‘Secretary Thomas Reid and the Early Listing of His Manuscripts; or, Did the Librarians Make Matters Worse?’, Northern Scotland 16 (1996): 175–85, on 176.

53 In November 1739 Reid took detailed notes from an English translation of Maupertuis’s La figure de la terre; see Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/3/1/2. He returned to the issue of the shape of the earth in January 1751 when he read Bouguer’s La figure de la terre; see Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/3/1/7. One book that Reid subscribed to while he was at New Machar was Patrick Cockburn, An Enquiry into the Truth and Certainty of the Mosaic Deluge, wherein the Arguments of the Learned Isaac Vossius, and others, for a Topical Deluge are Examined; and some Vulgar Errors, relating to the Grand Catastrophe, are Discover’d (London, 1750). I thank M. A. Stewart for this reference.

54 On the library at King’s see Robert S. Rait, The Universities of Aberdeen: A History (Aberdeen, 1895), 328–30. In the mid-1730s the two Aberdeen colleges fought a legal battle over the receipt of books from Stationers’ Hall in London. In July 1738 the dispute was settled in favor of King’s College, which meant that from this point onwards the collection at King’s continued to grow as new books were added on a regular basis. Reid and his colleagues also purchased books for the college library on an individual basis. Thus in 1763 Reid bought three titles on mathematics and natural philosophy for the library from the Edinburgh bookseller Gavin Hamilton; the receipt survives in Aberdeen University Library MS K 257/21/36/2.

55 Reid to Kames, 29 December 1762, in Reid, Correspondence, 22.
library likely grew through book subscriptions and purchases from booksellers in both Aberdeen and Edinburgh. As for more ephemeral reading materials like newspapers, he may well have read them in one of the local taverns or a coffee house.

We know much more about how Reid gained access to the written and printed word during his Glasgow years. Coffee houses or rooms, for example, had figured in the urban life of Glasgow since the 1670s. After his family’s move to Glasgow he undoubtedly frequented a coffee room to read newspapers and socialize and in his retirement he was one of the original subscribers to the Tontine Society, which funded the construction of a notable coffee house which opened in late 1782 or early 1783. Writing in 1797 the historian James Denholm enthused about the Tontine coffee room and said that it offered subscribers ‘the use of the room, newspapers and magazines; of which no Coffee Room in Britain can boast a greater variety’. He went on to say that the Tontine stocked not only the whole Scotch papers, but also the greatest part of those published in London, as well as some from Ireland, France, &c. besides reviews, magazines, and other periodical publications. At the daily arrival of the mail, a more stirring, lively, and anxious scene can hardly be imagined. Indeed, no part of the day passes without some concourse of subscribers … At those hours when the news of the morning may be said to have grown cold, the monthly publications claim attention in their turn, or people meet for the sake of looking out their acquaintance, or of engaging in casual parties of conversation.

The letter from William Ogilvie to Lord Buchan cited above in n. 22 above implies that Reid purchased a copy of the *Letters* of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu while he was in Edinburgh. The first edition of the *Letters* appeared in 1763.

Advertisements in the *Aberdeen Journal* indicate that there were at least three coffee houses open in Aberdeen in the period 1751 to 1764; see *Aberdeen Journal*, 22 January 1751, 21 November 1752, and 21 March 1763, for references to a coffee house operated by Miss Erskine Catto, the Royal Coffee House, and Wyllie’s Coffee House.


Colin Dunlop Donald, ‘The Tontine Building’, in *The Regality Club*. 2nd ser. (Glasgow, 1893), 82. John Anderson was one of the Managers of the Tontine Society.

James Denholm, *An Historical Account and Topographical Description of the City of Glasgow and Suburbs: Containing a History of the Rise and Progress of the City, a Description of the Public Buildings, and an Account of the Political Constitution, the University, and Corporate Bodies, Compiled from Authentic Records and Respectable Authorities* (Glasgow, 1797), 109. On the Tontine see also Andrew Brown, *History of Glasgow; and of Paisley, Greenock,*
According to Ramsay of Ochtertyre, Reid ‘loved conversation’ but as the years passed his increasing deafness inevitably interfered with his ability to participate in the kind of socializing carried on in the coffee room. Nevertheless, he was active in the affairs of the Tontine. In 1786, for example, he was among a group at the Tontine who responded to announcements in the London papers by pledging subscriptions for a proposed monument to honor the prison reformer John Howard. Reid himself donated two guineas and wrote on behalf of the group to the Committee of Subscribers in London informing them of the Glasgow initiative. The Tontine coffee room thus provided Reid with both an array of newspapers, journals, and ephemeral publications and a site for collective reading, conversation, and civic engagement.

Moreover, Denholm’s description of the Tontine serves to remind us that reading itself can have a daily rhythm which varies through the year and across the course of a lifetime. In Reid’s case, his individual reading had to be adjusted to suit his teaching schedule while he was still active in the classroom. During the session in Glasgow he gave his public lectures Monday through Saturday from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m., held an examination class weekdays from 11:00 a.m. until noon, and then immediately afterwards taught his private course three days a week. His collective oral reading of lectures was thus done according to a rigid daily schedule when the University was in session. In turn, this meant that serious or sustained individual reading had to be done largely in the afternoon or evening from late October through to May prior to his retirement from teaching. And, even after he retired, he still had to endure the interruption of the often fractious faculty and senate meetings which he dutifully attended during much of the year throughout his tenure of the Glasgow moral philosophy chair.

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*and Port-Glasgow; Comprehending the Ecclesiastical and Civil History of these Places, from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time: And Including an Account of the their Population, Commerce, Manufactures, Arts, and Agriculture*. 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1795–97), 2: 51–2. If Brown’s figures for the number of subscribers to the Tontine are accurate, the coffee room would have been one of the major sites for social interaction in Glasgow.

61 Ramsay of Ochtertyre, *Scotland and Scotsmen*, 1: 477. On the state of Reid’s hearing towards the end of his life see Reid to John Robison, 12 April 1792, in Reid, *Correspondence*, 230.

62 On this episode see Reid, *Correspondence*, 186–7, 304.

63 James Raven raises the question of when people read in his ‘New Reading Histories’, 283.

64 Reid to Andrew Skene, 14 November 1764, in Reid, *Correspondence*, 36.

65 His collective oral reading of sermons and ‘lectures’ while he was minister at New Machar likewise followed the set patterns of religious observance within the Church of Scotland.
Reid’s personal library grew steadily once he was settled in the ‘Venice of the North’. In Glasgow, he most likely bought the majority of his books from the noted booksellers and University printers Robert and Andrew Foulis, and, after 1776, from their successor Andrew the younger. His surviving correspondence shows that he also acquired new and used books from the Edinburgh booksellers William Creech and John Bell.66 His standing as a Glasgow Professor ensured that he received his share of letters from authors requesting that he subscribe to their works and his name appears as a subscriber to a diverse range of titles.67 Other books were sent to him as gifts by critics and admirers alike, including Joseph Priestley and Alexander Crombie amongst the former, and Richard Price, Edward Tatham, Archibald Alison, James Gregory, and Dugald Stewart amongst the latter.68 In addition, Reid seems to have accumulated a small collection of manuscripts, including letters from David Hume to himself and to George Campbell which he evidently prized. Samuel Rose, who was the son of the co-founder of the

66 Reid to Creech, 19 May 1778; Reid to Bell, 23 March 1786 and 21 February 1788, in Reid, Correspondence, 103, 180, 195–6. See also the letter to an unknown recipient dated 27 January 1789 (203), which is most likely addressed to Bell. Bell shipped Reid’s books to the Glasgow printer and bookseller James Duncan Jr.

67 Thomas Reid, Archibald Arthur and Archibald Davidson to [Thomas Brydson], 1 August 1788, and Robert Douglas and William Gordon to Reid, undated, in Reid, Correspondence, 200–1, 238–9. See also Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/7/VII/26 for a subscription flyer for Robert Fleming, Christology, or a Discourse concerning Christ; in himself, his Government, his Offices, &c., which was eventually published in Edinburgh in 1795. Reid did not subscribe. Reid did subscribe to: the Foulis edition of John Milton, Paradise Lost, a Poem (Glasgow, 1770); Francis Douglas, A General Description of the East Coast of Scotland, from Edinburgh to Cullen (Paisley, 1782); Rev. Rest Knipe, A Course of Lectures: Containing Remarks upon the Government and Education of Children, Thoughts upon the Present Plan of Education, and an Essay upon Eloquence (Edinburgh, 1783); and Andrew Shirrefs, Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect (Edinburgh 1790). I thank John Price for the reference to the Foulis Milton and Kurtis Kitagawa for bringing the Shirrefs subscription list to my attention.

68 Reid to James Gregory, [late February 1788] and 30 July 1789, [October 1793]; Reid to Archibald Alison, 3 February 1790; Reid to Edward Tatham, October 1791, in Reid, Correspondence, 196, 205, 208, 224, 232; William Gregory to Allan Maconochie, 5 April 1774, Meadowbank Papers (Microfilm), Edinburgh University Library Mic.M 1070; Richard Price to [James Wodrow], 20 January 1790, in The Correspondence of Richard Price, ed. Bernard Peach and D. O. Thomas. 3 vols. (Durham, NC, 1983–94), 3: 270–1; Joseph Priestley, An Examination of Dr. Reid’s Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense, Dr. Beattie’s Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, and Dr. Oswald’s Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion (London, 1774), [iii]. Dugald Stewart dedicated the first volume of his Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind (London, 1792) to Reid and would have sent him a copy. Stewart’s presentation copy of his Outlines of Moral Philosophy (Edinburgh, 1793) survives in a private collection.
Monthly Review, Dr. William Rose, and a distant relative of Reid’s, matriculated in Archibald Arthur’s moral philosophy class in the autumn of 1783. Shortly after Rose’s arrival in Glasgow he informed a correspondent that

I have once or twice drank tea with Dr Reid … Dr Reid is a very worthy man and very free of communicating his knowledge. He shewed me the other night a Literary Curiosity. It was a letter of Mr Hume’s to Principle [sic] Campbell on the subject of Miracles, on which subject those two Gentlemen had a Controversy. It was couched in the most polite and most diffident Terms. The Dr also promised to shew me a Letter of Mr Hume’s to himself on the subject of his Book.69

Reid also had family papers of significance for subsequent historians, including a ‘Genealogy of the Gregories’, and it may be that he collected other kinds of documents given that he presented the University library with ‘a Manuscript Introduction to the Irish or antient Scotch Language’ in March 1773.70 Unfortunately much of the family history material has now been lost, and there is no other evidence that speaks to the kinds of manuscripts he may have acquired.

When it came to borrowing books and periodicals Reid’s friends and colleagues periodically lent him titles of interest but most of the printed material Reid borrowed probably came from the University library.71 As part of his professorial duties Reid was closely involved in the administration of the library and, as an ex-librarian, he made his views known about how best to

69 Rose to E. Foss, 29 October 1783, Glasgow University Library, MS Gen 520/55; Innes Addison, Matriculation Albums, 135 (no. 4268). For Hume’s letter to Campbell see Hume, Letters, 1: 360–1. Hume’s letter to Reid was preserved amongst family papers and survives as Aberdeen University Library MS 2814/1/42; for the text of the letter see Hume to Reid, 25 February 1763, in Reid, Correspondence, 29–30.
70 Reid to James Gregory, 7 April 1783, in Reid, Correspondence, 162 and 300n.; ‘Minutes of Senate Meetings, 1771–1787’, Glasgow University Archive Services, SEN 1/1/1, 61.
71 For examples of Reid being lent books and periodicals see James Oswald of Methven to Reid, 16 October 1766, and [Robert Findlay] to Reid, [spring 1779], in Reid, Correspondence, 56, 119. Although there is no surviving evidence of Reid having done so, he could have borrowed books from the circulating library run by the bookseller John Smith and his son John Smith Jr. in the Trongate or, during the last years of his life, Stirling’s Library (which opened in 1791); Denholm, Historical Account, 174–6, and James Cleland, Annals of Glasgow, comprising an Account of the Public Buildings, Charities, and the Rise and Progress of the City. 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1816), 2: 433–42. However, it is unlikely that he borrowed a significant number of books from such sources.
organize a printed catalogue of the collection in a paper given to the Glasgow Literary Society in 1777. From an administrative point of view he therefore had a clear sense of the Library collection and, as a user, he quickly built up an intimate knowledge of the books owned by the University. Writing to David Skene in September 1767, he reported that over the summer ‘my time [was] at <my> command’ and he was thus
tempted to fall to the tumbling over Books, as we have a vast Number here which I had not access to see at Aberdeen… To pour Learning into a leaky vessel is indeed a very childish & ridiculous occupation Yet when a Man has leisure and is placed among books that are new to him it is difficult to resist the temptation.

As it turned out, Reid was unable to resist the lure of the library. His borrowings are documented in the minutes of the University Senate and the remarkable set of ‘Professors Receipt Books’, which record the books taken out of the University Library by each of the Glasgow professors from 1751 to 1789. The Senate minutes show that Reid regularly borrowed books primarily on mathematics and natural philosophy from the collection bequeathed to the University by the distinguished Professor of Mathematics, Robert Simson, at his death in 1768. The fact that Reid went through the formal process of

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72 Reid served on various Library committees and was the Quaestor of the Library from 1781 to 1783. For evidence of his involvement in the management of the University Library see: ‘Minutes of Faculty Meetings, 1753–1755 and 1761–1771’, Glasgow University Archive Services, GUA 26650, 124; ‘Minutes of Faculty Meetings, 1776–1780’, Glasgow University Archive Services, GUA 26691, 362; ‘Minutes of Senate Meetings, 1771–1787’, Glasgow University Archive Services, SEN 1/1/1, 242, 260; ‘Notes regarding the Old Library by Dr Reid’, Glasgow University Archive Services, GUA 8558; ‘Account [of] Dr Reid as Quæstor for the University Library of Glasgow from June 10th 1781 to Ditto 1783’, Glasgow University Archive Services, GUA 8617. Reid discussed the question ‘In a printed catalogue of a publick Library Whether is it most convenient that the books should be disposed in an Alphabetical order or in the order in which they stand’ on 4 April 1777; ‘Laws of the Literary Society in Glasgow College’, 51–2. The conversation in the Literary Society was related to the preparation of a new catalogue for the University library, which was eventually published in 1791. Reid’s protege Archibald Arthur served as University Librarian from 1774 to 1794 and Reid undoubtedly offered his advice on library matters to Arthur.

73 Reid to Skene, 14 September 1767, in Reid, Correspondence, 60.

74 ‘Minutes of Senate Meetings, 1771–1787’, Glasgow University Archive Services, SEN 1/1/1, 7, 107, 139, 294; ‘Minutes of Senate Meetings, 1787–1802’, Glasgow University Archive Services, SEN1/1/2, 174.
asking permission from Senate to borrow these books strongly suggests that they were not for casual browsing but rather for serious study.

The ‘Professors Receipt Books’ list approximately 615 books that Reid took out of the University Library during the period 1767 to 1789. As one might expect, he signed out some of these books more than once, some he kept only briefly, and some he retained for a few weeks or even months. The borrowing lists are fragmentary for the years 1765 to 1770 (with one extensive list being undated) and they do not contain the level of bibliographical detail found in subsequent lists. Consequently, at best we can say that prior to the calendar year 1770 he took out roughly 116 books. The lists covering May 1770 to May 1789 form a coherent sequence and are much more informative. They show that the number of books he borrowed declined from 51 in the calendar year 1770 to a low of 9 in 1774, and then gradually increased (with another dip to a low of 6 in 1777) to a high of 66 books in 1787 before dropping back to 31 and 20 books in 1788 and 1789 respectively. Retirement from teaching in the spring of 1780 clearly gave him more time for reading, although his use of the Library was far from negligible when he was still active in the classroom.

A preliminary analysis of the entries in the receipt books indicates that some of the books that Reid borrowed were used in his teaching, but most were not. The encyclopedic range of subjects covered by the books he took out corroborates the portrait of Reid penned by his associate William Ogilvie in 1764:

It is not in Metaphysics nor in moral Philosophy alone or even chiefly that Dr Reid is Eminent.
No Man in Scotland is more attached to, or has cultivated more the profounder parts of the Mathematicks & the Newtonian Philosophy.
In every thing that deserves the name of Science he is as knowing as any

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75 ‘Professors Receipt Book, 1765–1770’, Glasgow University Library, Spec Coll MS Lib (uncatalogued); ‘Professors Receipt Book, 1770–[1789]’, Glasgow University Library, Spec Coll MS Lib (uncatalogued). The receipt books also record that Reid borrowed books for other readers, including his sons George and David, his son-in-law Dr. Patrick Carmichael and ‘F Douglas’, presumably Francis Douglas, the author of *A General Description of the East Coast of Scotland*, to which Reid subscribed (see above n. 65). In 1782 Reid borrowed for Douglas Sir Robert Sibbald’s *A Collection of Several Treatises in Folio, concerning Scotland, As it was of Old, and also in Later Times* (Edinburgh, 1739). Douglas may have used the work when preparing his own book for the press.
whom I have conversed with who make the particular departments their Study.

Nor has he cultivated the Sciences to the neglect of other literature. He reads Richardson’s works with great eagerness, and happening when last at Edinburgh to get the letters ascribed to Lady Mary Worthley Montague after supping in a Tavern, he sat up and read the three volumes before Breakfast.76

Of the 615 books (459 titles) borrowed by Reid, I have been unable to identify 26 titles (6%). These unidentified titles are scattered across a number of topics and therefore their lack of identification does not skew my analysis of Reid’s reading habits. The remaining 589 books (433 titles) can be classified according to the following categories: learned journals; polite literature; classical literature; miscellaneous and reference works; history; antiquities; chorography; travel literature; theology and church history; medicine; mathematics; natural philosophy; natural history; chemistry; natural law; law; politics; political economy; moral philosophy; rhetoric; and education. The numerical results of this classification are shown in Table I. Starting at the lowest end of the table at under one per cent of the titles, Reid borrowed two works dealing with education and four each on law and rhetoric. All of the legal titles (which included Sir William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*) were devoted to the English law, which suggests that for whatever reason Reid endeavored to familiarize himself with details of the English legal system. Next we find five books on antiquities (1%) and a further five on chorography (1%). Reid is not thought of as someone with antiquarian interests, but the ‘Professors Receipt Books’ show that he read at least some of the works by the great French Benedictine scholars Jean Mabillon (1632–1707) and Bernard de Montfaucon (1655–1741), as well as William Stukeley’s *Itinerarium curiosum* and two books on ancient coins. In a related vein, Reid would have learned about English and Scottish antiquities in the topographical works that he borrowed from the Library, which included William Camden’s *Britannia* and Sir Robert Sibbald’s *Scotia illustrata*. Although the number of titles in these two categories is relatively small we need to bear in mind that both antiquarianism and chorography overlapped with history, travel, and natural history, and I will return to this point below.

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76 Ogilvie to Buchan, January 1764, as cited above in n. 22.
Another field linked to natural history was chemistry. During his Glasgow years Reid used six (1%) of the Library’s books on the subject, most notably in the spring of 1789 when he took out William Nicholson’s recently published four-volume translation of Antoine-François de Fourcroy’s *Elements of Natural History, and of Chemistry*. Dated 22 May 1789, a set of highly detailed reading notes from this text amounting to some 30 pages in length survives which shows that it was through his reading of Fourcroy that he was introduced to the theoretical innovations that constituted the core of the Chemical Revolution initiated by Fourcroy’s fellow Frenchman Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743–94). Another seven volumes (2%) taken out by Reid covered a subject that he surveyed in his lectures, namely political economy. What is most noteworthy about the list of books he consulted is not so much the titles it contains, but those that are absent, such as Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*.

Reid’s borrowings of editions of classical authors was decidedly modest, and limited to eleven titles (2%), of which he signed out more than once.

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77 Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/3/1/16. Reid also borrowed works by Herman Boerhaave, G. F. Stahl, and Torbern Olof Bergman along with a book on alchemy.
the writings of Apuleius and Homer. In purely numerical terms his use of books on natural law was only slightly greater than the editions of the classics, insofar as the lists contain thirteen natural law titles (3%). However, he repeatedly borrowed various editions of Hugo Grotius’s *De jure belli ac pacis libri tres* (presumably largely for teaching purposes) which makes his use of the Library’s natural law collection more significant than it might otherwise seem. And even if his reading of the natural law corpus was apparently relatively limited, he nevertheless familiarized himself with the writings of such figures as Francisco Suárez, Samuel Pufendorf, and J. G. Heineccius. The fifteen titles on medicine (3%) that Reid took out attest to his serious avocational engagement with medical theory and practice, which was partly stimulated by his friendships with the Edinburgh medical professors John Gregory and his son James (to whom he was related), the Aberdeen physicians Andrew Skene and his son David, and, after 1777, his son-in-law the Glasgow medic Patrick Carmichael.78 The medical books he read were an eclectic mix by mainly Scottish authors, primarily covering anatomy, physiology and midwifery, with multiple withdrawals of William Smellie’s *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* and *Dr. Albert Haller’s Physiology; being a Course of Lectures upon the Visceral Anatomy and Vital Oeconomy of Human Bodies*. A slightly larger group of 19 titles (4%) was devoted to politics, another of the subjects Reid covered in his public lecture course. Although one might expect that much of his borrowing was related to his teaching, it turns out that he consulted just over half of these titles after he retired from the classroom, with seven of them read in 1786. Most of the works on politics register Reid’s reformist and radical Whig politics, insofar as a number of them deal with republican theory and delineate republican polities, while others articulate various forms of country, commonwealth man or Old Whig ideology.

Learned journals form the next largest category of borrowings with 20 titles (4%), of which a number were borrowed repeatedly, such as the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*. The majority of the journals covered the natural sciences and thus register his scientific interests, but he also read widely in general periodicals reviewing books dealing with the full spectrum of human learning and was thus in touch with recent developments in a Republic of Letters that stretched from St Petersburg to Philadelphia. Reid’s scientific interests were further manifest in his use of

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78 Reid presumably steered his son George (1755–80) towards the study of medicine. The younger Reid attended the lectures of William Hunter in London and had embarked on a career as a medic in the military before his premature death.
23 titles on mathematics (5%) and 24 on natural history (5%). His reading in mathematics was decidedly eclectic, ranging from the works of Leonhard Euler to texts on bookkeeping and annuities. In the field of natural history, on the other hand, his reading was much more focused and centered on the writings of Linnaeus. The ‘Professors Receipt Books’ show that he sought out books on all three of the kingdoms of nature, as well as gardening, agricultural improvement, and the controversial subject of the history of earth which he had earlier grappled with in Aberdeen. Reid also selected 24 titles (5%) drawn from the voluminous literature on travel. This category is far from self-contained for it overlaps in significant ways with works on the natural histories of the earth and humankind, as well as history and chorography, and his reading of a comparatively large number of travel accounts was thus bound up with his serious cultivation of the sciences of nature and man. His curiosity extended from Samuel Johnson’s *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* and Thomas Pennant’s tours in Wales and Scotland, to the records of journeys through various parts of Europe and Asia and on to the narratives of circumnavigations of the globe by George Anson and Louis-Antoine de Bougainville. Like so many of his contemporaries, therefore, his knowledge of ‘men and things’ was rooted not only in his own somewhat limited experience of the world but also in the pages of the many travel books that he consulted. The sixth largest category of titles borrowed by Reid encompasses the various branches of natural philosophy. The 28 volumes (6%) that he signed out form something of a miscellaneous group. Not surprisingly, editions of Newton’s writings figure prominently, as do the works by leading Newtonians such as Colin Maclaurin and Henry Pemberton. But so too do texts dealing with the sciences Reid had considerable expertise in, namely astronomy and optics. Pneumatics also features in the lists, along with a number of books written by leading seventeenth-century men of science like Robert Boyle, Pierre Gassendi, Robert Hooke, Johannes Kepler, and John Wilkins.

The remaining five categories are significantly larger numerically than those already discussed. I have classified 38 titles (8%) as miscellaneous because none of them fits neatly under the other headings I have used. Included here are reference works such as the *Encyclopédie*, library catalogs, grammars, dictionaries, how-to manuals (including John Byrom’s *The Universal English Short-Hand* and two books on chess) and a work which occupied the nebulous space between science and showmanship, *Breslaw’s Last Legacy; or, The Magical*
Companion." Polite literature was the fourth largest class of books borrowed, with 39 titles (9%) recorded in the ‘Professors Receipt Books’. As William Ogilvie indicated in his tribute to the catholicity of Reid’s intellect, Reid was an inveterate reader of novels. The lists show that he was especially fond of those by Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett, although his reading extended to Fanny Burney and other novelists fashionable in the period but now little known. He also had a wide-ranging taste for poetry which encompassed earlier Scottish Latin poets, the English Augustans Matthew Prior and Alexander Pope, Thomas Gray, and James Macpherson among others. In addition, he took home the prose writings of Colley Cibber and his son Theophilus, Jonathan Swift, Fielding, Samuel Johnson, and various minor essayists of the day. The most surprising category of works in terms of size is that of history, which accounted for 42 titles (9%). The texts that Reid selected well illustrate the diversity within history writing in the early modern period. He read universal histories, standard narrative histories of England and Scotland, histories of Great Britain and Ireland, Polybius, histories of various European nations, histories of China, editions of historical documents, histories of the native peoples of North America, histories of military campaigns, political histories, histories of ancient Greece and Rome, histories of law and of printing, as well as examples of philosophical history written by his colleague John Millar, David Hume, William Robertson, James Dunbar, Adam Ferguson, William Falconer, and Voltaire. Of these works, the library records suggest that he studied most closely volume one of Robertson’s History of Scotland and the first two volumes of Hume’s History of England, insofar as he took all three out on 13 September 1769 and returned them on 22 February 1770.80 Thus we see that Reid’s science of man was no less firmly grounded in history than Hume’s, even though Reid’s Inquiry and two Essays effectively mask this fact.

Equally varied was Reid’s reading in moral philosophy. Over the years covered by the ‘Professors Receipt Books’ he borrowed 42 titles (9%), and

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79 Philip Breslaw (1726–83) was a German emigré who settled in London and became a popular magician; see Simon During, Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic (Cambridge, MA and London, 2002), 86–7. Reid borrowed Breslaw’s Last Legacy; or, The Magical Companion: Containing All that is Curious, Pleasing, Entertaining, and Comical; Selected from the most Celebrated Masters of Deception; As well with Slight of Hand, as with Mathematical Inventions… in which is Displayed, the Way to make the Air Balloon and Inflammable Air. 4th ed. (London, 1784).

80 Reid’s reading of Hume’s volumes on the history of the Stuarts provides a further illustration of the pattern of Scottish responses to Hume’s History noted by Mark Towsey; see Towsey, Reading the Scottish Enlightenment, 79–80, 235
checked out more than once works by Aristotle, Plato, Sir Francis Bacon, Ralph Cudworth, John Locke, G. W. Leibniz, Pierre Gassendi, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, and James Beattie, among others. As this list of authors indicates his borrowing was weighted towards the seventeenth century, for he also made use of books by Bartholomäus Keckermann, Gerhard Johann Vossius, Franco Burgersdijk, René Descartes, Joseph Glanvill, Henry More, Theophilus Gale, and Pierre Bayle. His borrowing of eighteenth-century texts was slightly more limited, with volumes by John Toland, Christian Wolff, J. Lyons, Robert Dodsley, James Harris, Joseph Spence, Joseph Priestley, John Bruce, Lord Mondboddo, J. J. Winckelmann, and the Jesuit critic of Voltaire, Claude-Adrien Nonnotte, entered in the lists. However, by far the largest group of books taken out by Reid was devoted to theology and church history. The library records show that he borrowed 62 titles (14%) that deal with various facets of the Christian religion. A few of the volumes he signed out deal with the early history of the Christian church, but just one related to the Church Fathers. As a good Protestant he was interested in Paolo Sarpi; however, the only other continental Catholic authors whose religious works he read were Erasmus, Blaise Pascal, and the noted preacher Jean Baptiste Massillon (1663–1742). Biblical criticism is also noticeable by its relative absence, although he did borrow a manuscript version of the octateuch in Greek which he seems to have made available to the controversial Scots Catholic scholar Alexander Geddes (1737–1802), who in the early 1780s was working on a new translation of the Bible. His borrowing was primarily focused on titles by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English divines and on works that expounded the reasonableness of Christian belief. From the seventeenth century he read various texts by Richard Baxter, John Bramhall, the Puritan polemicist William Prynne, John Wilkins, and the Cambridge Platonist John Smith. The names of eighteenth-century Anglican churchmen repeatedly crop up in the library lists, most notably Thomas Sherlock, Thomas Secker, Beilby Porteus, Robert Lowth, and Conyers Middleton, whose writings were evidently of great interest to him given the number of works by Middleton that he borrowed. Significantly, Reid took out far fewer books by English Dissenters and his fellow Scots.

81 Reid also borrowed [Samuel Jackson], Supplement to the Life of David Hume, Esq. containing Genuine Anecdotes, and a Circumstantial Account of his Death and Funeral. To which is added, a Certified Copy of his Last Will and Testament (London, 1777).

82 For Reid’s contact with Geddes and Geddes’s work on the Glasgow manuscript see the slightly garbled account in John Mason Good, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Reverend Alexander Geddes, I.L. D. (London, 1803), 37–8, 88, 111.
The most prominent Dissenters he perused were his nemesis Joseph Priestley and Nathaniel Lardner, while his reading of Scottish religious literature was confined to titles by the seventeenth-century Glaswegian Zachary Boyd and later clergymen like John Anderson, James Oswald, Alexander Gerard, and his colleague from 1782 onwards, Robert Findlay. The one common thread connecting many of these ecclesiastics is that they were known for their stylish preaching and well crafted sermons and there is little doubt that he read them partly with an eye to their style.

What, then, do the ‘Professors Receipt Books’ tell us about Reid and his reading habits?\(^\text{83}\) First, they show that he had a reading competence in English, French, Latin and Greek, as well as in higher mathematics. He was thus an able linguist even though he was not a polyglot by the standards of the day.\(^\text{84}\) Secondly, and more importantly, the pattern of his book borrowing suggests that Reid can best be understood as a figure whose intellectual priorities reflect those of the virtuosi who initially shaped the Scottish Enlightenment. As Roger Emerson has argued, Enlightenment in Scotland was first promoted by a cohort of men active at the turn of the eighteenth century like Sir Robert Sibbald.\(^\text{85}\) Sibbald and his fellow virtuosi were patriotic improvers who were inspired by a Baconian vision of human progress fueled by the growth of knowledge gained through observation and experiment, the compilation of natural histories, and the application of the inductive method. From Bacon the virtuosi also appropriated the view

\(^{83}\) Although it might be objected that the receipt books tell us more about the strengths of the University library than they do about Reid’s intellectual interests, the objection ignores the fact that the pattern of his borrowings broadly conforms to what we might expect given William Ogilvie’s portrait of Reid quoted above. Moreover, the range of subjects covered by Reid’s reading notes discussed below is much the same as that of his borrowings recorded in the receipt books, even though the balance of subjects differs. Also, Reid’s comments to David Skene in his letter of 14 September 1767 quoted above indicate that he was able to read books in Glasgow that he was unable to consult in Aberdeen, that is, that his use of the University library was a function of the fields he was interested in. Consequently, the ‘Professors Receipt Books’ seem to me to provide us with a reliable indication of Reid’s intellectual priorities.

\(^{84}\) Apparently Reid did not think that his linguistic abilities were especially strong; see the anecdote recorded in William Beattie, Life and Letters of Thomas Campbell. 2nd ed. 3 vols. (London, 1850), 3: 227.

that all of the various branches of learning constituted a unified whole, and hence that the sciences of nature and humankind were interrelated. The modalities of improvement meant that the polite gentleman envisaged by the virtuosi was as likely to experiment with new plantings on his estate(s) as he was to scrutinize Scotland’s troubled history or to try to fathom the physical principles governing Newton’s system of the world. Consequently the virtuosi set about the study of natural philosophy, natural history, mathematics, history, antiquities, chorography, medicine, and morals, collected coins and artefacts, sunk mines, drained land, built steam engines, redesigned farm implements, recorded local lore, mapped and surveyed the nation, wrote letters to like-minded men across the Atlantic world, formed clubs, and traveled both within Scotland and abroad to observe ‘men and things’ in order to bring about a Great Instauration.

The ‘Professors Receipt Books’ allow us to see more clearly than ever before that Reid inherited the set of assumptions that structured the world view of Sibbald’s generation of Scottish virtuosi. Although he questioned their belief in the unity of knowledge, he nevertheless remained true to their outlook. Even though his published writings provide a limited sense of the continuities between his own researches and those of his predecessors, the detailed examination of his extant manuscripts and correspondence, along with little known sources like the ‘Professors Receipt Books’, demonstrate that he self-consciously built on the foundations that they had laid. His surviving letters to his kinsman James Gregory from the 1780s show that he saw himself as perpetuating the Gregory family’s scientific and mathematical legacy, and there was thus for Reid a personal as well as an intellectual link to the virtuosi who launched the Scottish Enlightenment. And like them he cultivated in varying degrees many different branches of learning, including, as we now know, mathematics, natural history, medicine and natural philosophy, as well as the science of the mind. In addition, the ‘Professors Receipt Books’ reveal for the first time that he too was fascinated by history, antiquities, and chorography, and that he shared their taste for the Baconian blend of human and natural history to be found in travel accounts. Moreover, his reading of books on topics such as agricultural improvement, navigation, and bookkeeping point to the fact his understanding of Enlightenment, like that of the virtuosi, was framed in terms of both theoretical inquiry and practical action. I have

previously posed the question, ‘Who was Thomas Reid?’ Having analyzed the ‘Professors Receipt Books’, I suggest that we can now say that he was a Scottish virtuoso.

III

How did Reid read books? One important source of evidence for past reading practices and reader response is marginalia and annotations. In Reid’s case it is striking that the books that he owned contain almost no marginalia and are largely unannotated. Apart from his characteristic signature ‘Tho Reid’ (usually in the top right corner of the title page), his books typically lack marginal notes or comments. Occasionally he added references to other works, while in some of his books he corrected typographical errors using the book’s errata list and, in the case of his copy of the first edition of Kames’s *Sketches of the History of Man*, he inserted some minor textual revisions. The only book that was once in his library that I have been able to trace that appears to incorporate significant marginal marks is his copy of the collected sermons of the seventeenth-century Anglican churchman Robert Sanderson. In this work, Reid has written either ‘NB’ or placed an ‘X’ next to passages of interest in five sermons in the collection. However, he has left no trace of why he thought that these passages were worth flagging and hence their meaning

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89 The one surviving title from Reid’s library that is not signed at the top right corner is his copy of Francis Hutcheson’s *A System of Moral Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Glasgow and London, 1755). The title pages of both volumes are signed vertically along the left margin. The first volume is signed ‘Tho. Reid’, and the second ‘Tho Reid P.P.D.’, indicating his status as a Professor of Philosophy at King’s College Aberdeen.

90 For an example of an added reference see Reid’s copy of Henry Pemberton, *Epistola ad amicum de Catesii inventis, curvarum ratione, qua cum circulo & hyperbola comparationem admittunt* (London, 1722), 14. The corrections indicated in the errata list have been made in the text of his copy of Samuelis Werenfelsii SS. *Theolog. Doctoris ejusdemque in academia Basiliensis professoris opuscula theologica, philosophica et philologica* (Basil, 1718). These two titles are held by Glasgow University Library. His copy of Kames’s *Sketches* is now in the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds.
for him remains elusive.\footnote{Robert Sanderson, \textit{XXXVI Sermons. Viz. XVII ad aulam. V ad clerum. VI ad magistratum. VIII ad populum. With a large preface}, 8th edn (London, 1689), bound with \textit{XXI Sermons. Viz. XVII ad aulam. III ad magistram. I ad populum} (London, 1686), 39, 88, 91, 93, 94, 95, 133, 142, 353, 603, 608, 635, 638. This book is in Glasgow University Library. The lack of detailed annotations recording Reid’s personal responses in the books that he once owned aligns his reading practices with those that H. J. Jackson argues were typical of the period prior to 1700; see Jackson, \textit{Marginalia}, 44 – 53.} Yet even if the pages of his books tell us little about his response to what he read, there is one annotation which indicates that he was a discerning buyer of used books. His copy of the Scottish mathematician John Craig’s \textit{De calculo fluentium libri duo} is of some note because on the front fly leaf the book is inscribed ‘Ex dono Viri Clarissimi D. Gulielmi Burnet/Colin McLaurin Londini Junii 26 1719’. Reid clearly appreciated the importance of the copy for he wrote on the fly leaf ‘The Autograph of Maclaurin’, that is, the hand of the man who had briefly taught him mathematics at Marischal College in the 1720s.\footnote{Reid’s copy of the Craig title is in Glasgow University Library. Maclaurin acquired the book on his first trip to London in the summer of 1719, and was most likely given it by Gilbert Burnett’s eldest son William (1688–1729), who was then still living in London.}

Reid’s responses to the books that he read are recorded in numerous manuscripts that survive.\footnote{The surviving sets of reading notes speak to Reid’s place in the tradition of learned readers in early modern Europe. As Anthony Grafton has observed, ‘Reading in early modern Europe—at least learned reading—implied copying and sorting as well as scanning’; Grafton, ‘Is the History of Reading a Marginal Enterprise?’, 156. Reid’s notes attest to his adoption of these reading practices.} I have identified 94 sets of notes and extracts, along with five ‘abstracts’ and seven sets of what he variously called ‘remarks’, ‘reflections’, or ‘observations’. Some of these items can be correlated with the entries in the ‘Professors Receipt Books’ but most record other titles read by Reid at various stages in his career starting with the earliest reading notes taken in October 1729 to the last set dated 4 August 1796, just two months before he died.\footnote{The earliest surviving set of notes is from Isaac Newton’s \textit{Philosophiæ naturalis principia mathematica} (London, 1687); see Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/7/III/15. The last dated set is from Adam Smith’s \textit{Theory of Moral Sentiments}. 6th ed. 2 vols. (London, 1790); see Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/3/1/29.} The sets of reading notes and extracts range in length from the simple entry of a title to the thirty-two pages of detailed notes from Pierre Bouguer’s \textit{Le figure de la terre} taken in January 1751, which he updated with a brief addendum a few years later.\footnote{For entries of only a title see Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/3/1/16, fol 3v, and 4/1/3, p. 19. For the notes from Bouguer see Aberdeen University Library MS
documents deal with published material, one set of reading notes was taken in August 1767 from a two-volume manuscript collection ‘containing letters & papers’ of the seventeenth-century Scottish cleric and Principal of Glasgow University, Robert Baillie (1602–62). By contrast, all of the abstracts and the sets of remarks focus on published books. The extant abstracts vary in length from less than a page to the twenty pages devoted to Joseph Butler’s *The Analogy of Religion*. We also know of an important and most likely lengthy abstract lost to us, namely the one that he made of Hume’s *Treatise*. The lengths of the sets of remarks are likewise variable, the shortest being a one-page critical discussion of a section in volume two of J. T. Desagulier’s *A Course of Experimental Philosophy*, and the longest the fifty-page ‘Observations on the Modern System of Materialism’.

Reid differentiated between these three categories of document and, for him, they represented three different moments in the reading process. Of the three, his notes and extracts contain his most immediate response to the texts that he encountered. His notes are often (but unfortunately not always) headed with a date and typically begin with the word or phrase ‘Read’, ‘I read’, or ‘Began to read’. There follows information about the book or pamphlet he is reading or has just read, written in a format derived from John Locke’s ‘A New Method of a Common-Place-Book’. ‘To take notice of a Place in an Author from whom I quote something’, Locke wrote,

I make use of this Method: Before I write any thing, I put the Name of the Author in my *Common-Place-Book*, and under that Name the Title of Treatise, the Size of the Volume, the Time and Place of its Edition, and (what ought never to be omitted) the Number of Pages that the whole Book contains.

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96 Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/3/1/18. At least some of the materials that Reid read in manuscript were subsequently published in Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals: Containing an Impartial Account of Public Transactions, Civil, Ecclesiastical, and Military, in England and Scotland, from the beginning of the Civil Wars in 1637 to the Year 1662…*. 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1775).

97 Reid mentions this abstract in the so-called ‘abstract’ of the Inquiry transmitted to Hume via Hugh Blair; see Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/2/III/1, 1.


Although Reid thought that Locke’s method had led to the proliferation of the ‘Dictionary of Arts and Sciences which distinguish the present Age from all preceding ones’, he nevertheless recommended the method as one of the main tools for improving memory in his Glasgow lectures on the culture of the mind. Hence Reid knew Locke’s ‘New Method’ well and while he did not himself keep common place books he followed Locke’s precepts in the format of the headings of his reading notes. As for the body of these notes, they typically contain a miscellany of direct quotations; summaries of individual chapters, sections or the whole work; details of books cited; and commentary on the contents of the text in question. If the book was in French or Latin his notes are sometimes in the original language, although he also took notes in English, so that an act of translation was involved in the reading and writing process. And if the notes were taken from a book on mathematics or natural philosophy, on occasion he worked through the proofs and noted mistakes made or problems encountered. In terms of the level of critical response there was thus some overlap between Reid’s reading notes and his abstracts and sets of reflections, but he nonetheless regarded them as constituting distinct genres.

The difference between a set of reading notes and an abstract for Reid seems to have been one of degree rather than kind, with abstracts typically incorporating detailed summaries rather than direct quotations and excerpts. In Reid’s mind at least, the making of an abstract was also closely related to Locke’s method of compiling common place books, for in his Glasgow lectures he conjoined the two activities and gave his students instructions on how to draw up abstracts. Moreover, for Reid abstracts were apparently written after a text had been read and thoroughly digested, a point implied by his comment that ‘I read [Hume’s] treatise over and over with great care, made an abstract


Reid, _Thomas Reid on Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts_, 64. See also Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/4/1/7, fol 1v, where Reid also refers to Sir Francis Bacon.

For example, compare Aberdeen University Library MSS 2131/3/II/12 and 3/II/13.

One significant example of this occurs in the notes Reid made from the first edition of Newton’s _Principia Mathematica_ on 6 October 1729, Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/7/III/15. On these notes see Niccolò Guicciardini, ‘Thomas Reid’s Mathematical Manuscripts: A Survey’, _Reid Studies_ 4 (2001): 71–86, on 79.

Reid, _Thomas Reid on Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts_, 64; Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/4/1/7, fol 1v.
of it and wrote my observations upon it’. In the sequence he recalled here, it is the ‘reflections’ or ‘observations’ that come last and they are therefore the documents written at the greatest temporal and cognitive remove from the initial act of reading. The most extreme surviving example of this distance is Reid’s ‘Some Observations on the Modern System of Materialism’, which has its origins in his reading of Joseph Priestley’s *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* and related writings. The ‘Observations’ grew out of various sets of reading notes as well as discourses before the Glasgow Literary Society, and the surviving drafts of the work illustrate that Reid extensively reworked his text before arriving at something like a final version. Consequently, the temporal gap between his initial reading of Priestley’s *Disquisitions* and the composition of the ‘Observations’ may have been as much as ten years or more, and the intellectual gap separating his first and final thoughts on Priestley’s materialism was likewise considerable. And although the other surviving sets of ‘remarks’, ‘reflections’, and ‘observations’ were more closely connected both temporally and intellectually with the printed texts that provoked them, they all represent a further step beyond his immediate response to those texts, which in one case led on to an anonymous attack on Priestley published in the *Monthly Review*.

What do these various manuscripts tell us about Reid’s reading habits? Compared with the ‘Professor’s Receipt Books’, they provide a rather different profile of his intellectual interests and priorities (see Table II). The 106 surviving sets of notes, abstracts and reflections deal with a total of 98 titles. These documents record that Reid read one title each (1%) in the categories of antiquities, medicine, miscellaneous, natural law, newspapers, polite literature, political economy, reference, and rhetoric. He took reading notes or made extracts from only two religious titles (2%), Lord Herbert of Cherbury’s *De veritate* and Hugh Blair’s *Sermons*. His papers contain notes on three titles in history (3%), including a brief set on William Robertson’s *History of Charles V*. A further three dealing primarily with the natural sciences fall in the

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104 Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/2/III/1, p. 1. Compare Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/8/1/19, fol 1r, ‘Resolved to make an Abstract of Locke’s Chapter on Maxims & to make Remarks upon it’.

105 This is also implied in his Glasgow lecture notes; see Reid, *Thomas Reid on Logic, Rhetoric and the Fine Arts*, 64, where Reid writes ‘Abstracts of Books. & Judgments of them’.

106 The genealogy of the ‘Observations’ is discussed in my editorial introduction to Reid, *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 38–41.


category of learned journals (3%), while politics accounts for another four (4%). According to Table II we would have to say that all of these subjects were of minor interest to Reid if it were not for the evidence provided by the ‘Professors Receipt Books’.

With nine titles (9%) natural history ranks as his fourth most popular form of reading. A few of the books he consulted like Henri-Louis Du Hamel de Monceau’s *La physique des arbres* (1758) provided content for his natural history lectures at King’s College, but his reading of works by Bonnet, Buffon, Fourcroy, and Tournefort was prompted by his broader engagement with the classification and description of the three kingdoms of nature.\(^\text{109}\) Mathematics is in third place with 17 titles (17%). Some of the mathematical books were used for his teaching at King’s; however, a significant proportion of his reading took place both before and after his time there as a regent. As his notes show, over the course of his life he expended considerable intellectual energy grappling with the technicalities of Newton’s fluxional method, the properties of numbers, the practical applications of mathematics, and, from the mid-1750s onward, the foundations of Euclidean geometry.\(^\text{110}\)

Moral philosophy is second on the list with 25 titles (26%). His earliest notes and abstracts deal with such figures as Samuel Clarke, Peter Browne, Epictetus, Xenophon, and, most notably, Joseph Butler, whereas his later ones focus on thinkers whose philosophical doctrines he opposed, namely Archibald Campbell, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, Lord Kames, Joseph Priestley, and Adam Smith, whose *Theory of Moral Sentiments* sparked his critical interest in 1759 and at the end of his life in 1796. Marginally ahead of moral philosophy in first place on the list in Table II is natural philosophy, with 26 titles (27%). The chronological spread of his notes and abstracts is much like those related to moral philosophy, insofar as they date from 1729 right through to the 1790s and encompass each phase of his career from a student at Marischal College through to a Glasgow professor retired from the classroom. Consequently at least some of his reading was done in conjunction with writing lectures at King’s. But the majority of titles on the various branches of natural philosophy were read for other reasons. His engagement with Newton’s system of the world is a continuing thread through his notes, as is his interest in mechanics, physical optics and the theory of vision, and astronomy considered not only

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mathematically and physically but also practically. Three sets of notes derive from works on the popular sciences of electricity and pneumatics (including two books by his critic Joseph Priestley), although he seems not to have shared the widespread mania for these fields.\footnote{Reid read Priestley’s *The History and Present State of Electricity* in August 1768 (Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/3/1/9), and Priestley’s *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air* in 1781 (Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/3/1/24).} As a man of science, then, his tastes were for the mathematical rather than Baconian sciences, his expertise as an experimentalist notwithstanding.\footnote{For the distinction between the mathematical and Baconian sciences see Thomas S. Kuhn, ’Mathematical versus Experimental Traditions in the Development of Physical Science’, in his *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago and London, 1977), 30–65.}

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In terms of the body of evidence encapsulated in Table II, therefore, Reid would be best characterized as a natural philosopher, moralist, and mathematician who had a strong predilection for natural history. He thus emerges here as he did in Table I as a Scottish variant of Robert Boyle’s Christian virtuoso, although his wide reading in religion, history, and travel literature are, for reasons which remain unclear, virtually unrecorded in his surviving manuscripts.
IV

There can be few eighteenth-century readers who have left more of a trace of how and what they read than Thomas Reid. From a close examination of his surviving papers, the books he once owned, and institutional records such as the ‘Professors Receipt Books’ we can learn a good deal about reading practices in the age of Enlightenment. Regarding what I have called the ‘master narrative’ of the history of reading, we have seen that his changing domestic circumstances and the realities of his daily life point to the problematic nature of the terms ‘private’ and ‘solitary’ when applied to what I have preferred to call ‘individual’ reading in the eighteenth century. In Reid’s case, it is more accurate to say that he typically read in the company of others to whom he was not reading orally and there is no reason to think that he was in any way exceptional. This is not to say, however, that Reid did not read aloud to small domestic groups for it is likely that he read to his family and we know that he read convivially to his friends Lord Kames and John Anderson. Within the circles of his family and his friends, there was thus a mix of individual and collective as well as silent and oral modes of reading. And as for Rolf Engelsing’s thesis that there was a reading revolution during the eighteenth century prompted by the replacement of intensive by extensive modes of reading, apart from the general criticisms I have already noted, Reid’s reading habits bring into question the legitimacy of Engelsing’s clumping together of novels, newspapers, and periodicals as the forms of print most closely associated with extensive reading. The ‘Professors Receipt Books’ record that Reid signed out Smollet’s *Peregrine Pickle* in February 1769 and again in April 1786, which strongly suggests that he read some novels more than once. Hence Reid’s reading habits indicate that novels were occasionally read and reread in the same manner as the kinds of texts Engelsing claimed were earlier subjected to intensive reading. If Reid was in any way a typical reader, it would thus seem that eighteenth-century readers did not necessarily conceive of novels in the same way as they did newspapers or periodicals.

When we focus on Reid’s reading practices, we also come to appreciate more fully the different types of silent and especially oral reading that he engaged in during the course of his career. In a seminal article on the history of reading, Roger Chartier provided a preliminary survey of the various ways in which early modern Europeans read aloud for leisure in the company of family and friends and in doing so briefly drew attention to three main forms
of public and professional ‘vocalized reading’, namely delivering sermons and conducting church services, reading in legal and political contexts, and lecturing in colleges and universities.\textsuperscript{113} Reid’s experience as a reader illustrates virtually all of the modes of reading aloud identified by Chartier. His reading of Priestley’s \textit{Examination} to Lord Kames and the assembled company at Blairdrummond is an instance of where ‘the book is placed at the center of a literate social gathering, one that is friendly, worldly, and cultivated’, while his reading of texts with John Anderson at Dumbarton evokes Chartier’s ‘individual readings’ carried out amongst a few friends ‘[that] nourished study and personal meditation’.\textsuperscript{114} The many papers he presented to the Philosophical Club, the Aberdeen Philosophical Society and the Glasgow Literary Society instantiate the world of polite, formalized sociability Chartier associates with the salon and academy.\textsuperscript{115} Moreover, it is almost certain that he followed the Protestant practice of reading the Bible to his family and catechizing them, and it is likely that he read, or was read to, in a domestic setting.\textsuperscript{116} And in the public sphere, his preaching and teaching serve as telling examples of the professional forms of oral reading that Chartier points to, with his Glasgow classes being particularly revealing because his examination hours show that even within the highly formalized and hierarchical setting of the university there was room for what I have called ‘interactive’ reading involving the interplay between professor and student. Reid’s life as a reader was thus a varied one. He read silently and he read aloud; he read individually and he read collectively to very different audiences ranging from his family to his students; he read for both personal and professional reasons; and he read for pleasure and for profit. Reading for Reid was, therefore, a complex of related activities prompted by a mixture of motives in a variety of settings and his experience typifies the multifaceted nature of reading in early modern Europe.\textsuperscript{117}

To conclude, we can appropriate an apt phrase from Roger Chartier and characterize Thomas Reid as a ‘virtuoso reader’.\textsuperscript{118} In the sense intended by Chartier, Reid was a virtuoso reader because he was a scholar able to read

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Chartier, ‘Leisure and Sociability’, 105, 107. Reid’s reading of Priestley was not a ‘gift’ in Chartier’s terms (109–10) because he was asked to read by Lord Kames.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 115–18.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 115–18.
\item \textsuperscript{117} On this point see also Colclough, \textit{Consuming Texts}, chs. 2 and 3.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Chartier, ‘Frenchness in the History of the Book’, 324.
\end{itemize}
and translate between a number of languages (including the languages of mathematics) and to comprehend complex textual forms as well as sustained and highly abstract arguments. But Reid was a virtuoso reader in a second, culturally specific, sense, namely that he shared and propagated the intellectual priorities and tastes of the virtuosi who had earlier initiated the process of Enlightenment in Scotland. This double layer of meaning speaks to the fact that the ways in which individuals read is structured not only by their material but also by their cultural circumstances.

To consider Reid as a reader is, therefore, also to (re)consider his place in the Enlightenment. What we know of his preaching style and his comments on pulpit oratory indicate that he was a defender of a moderate, rational brand of Protestantism who resolutely opposed the evangelical Calvinism of the High Flyers within the Kirk. The numerous books on religion and church history that he borrowed from Glasgow University Library also suggest that his religious outlook was akin to that of William Robertson and the Moderates, although it also bore the inflection of his upbringing in the North East of Scotland. And if he eschewed zeal in the pulpit, he also avoided displaying ‘warmth in the cause of virtue’ in the classroom. For all of his ardent opposition to what he and many eighteenth-century readers took to be Humean scepticism, he nevertheless proved himself to be Hume’s ‘Disciple in Metaphysicks’ in his lectures by cultivating the dispassionate style of the anatomist of mind rather than the ‘easy and obvious manner’ perfected by the painters of virtue.119 Like George Campbell and Alexander Gerard within his community of readers in Aberdeen, he sought to refute Hume primarily using the skills of the logician rather than those of the mere rhetorician. His reading practices when preaching and teaching thus situate him within the ambit of the Robertsonian Moderates who similarly condemned the irreligious implications of Hume’s doctrines while respecting his person, and who also shared Hume’s distaste for superstition, religious enthusiasm, and the pulpit demagoguery of the Popular Party and their ilk. Furthermore, the pattern of Reid’s reading revealed in the ‘Professor’s Receipt Books’ and his surviving manuscripts allows us to bring his place within the Enlightenment into even better focus than his preaching and teaching for they demonstrate that his intellectual profile bears a close family resemblance to that of Sibbald’s generation of virtuosi. Following in their footsteps, he sought to improve both the material and moral condition of humankind by cultivating polite and useful learning in the various branches of

119 Reid to David Hume, 18 March 1763; in Reid, Correspondence, 31; Hume, Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, 87.
civil and natural history, mathematics, medicine, moral and natural philosophy, and in newly emerging fields like political economy. He was undoubtedly better equipped to appreciate the significance of the Newtonian revolution than many of his forebears, but he nevertheless adapted the essentials of their Baconian program to the changing circumstances of Scotland during the course of the eighteenth century. Reid was thus an exemplary virtuoso reader of the Scottish Enlightenment.

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University of Victoria
What a poor piece of work [is a puppet] compared with the body of a man, whose structure the more we know, the more wonders we discover in it, and the more sensible we are of our ignorance! (Reid, 103).1

Loath to admit that our science is at best the reflection of a reality we cannot know, we strive to penetrate to existence in itself; and what we have laboured intensely to attain, we at last fondly believe we have accomplished. But, like Ixion, we embrace a cloud for a divinity. Conscious only of, — conscious only in and through, limitation, we think to comprehend the Infinite; and dream even of establishing the science — the nescience of man, on an identity with the omniscience of God. (Hamilton, 37–8).2

We sit as in a boundless Phantasmagoria and Dream-grotto; boundless, for the faintest star, the remotest century, lies not even nearer the verge thereof … Then, in that strange Dream, how we clutch at shadows as if they were substances; and sleep deepest while fancying ourselves most awake! Which of your Philosophical Systems is other than a dream-theorem; a net quotient, confidently given out, where divisor and dividend are both unknown? … they only are wise who know that they know nothing. (Carlyle, SR, 42).3

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1 All references in this form are to Thomas Reid, The Works of Thomas Reid, preface, notes, and supplementary dissertations by Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh and London, 1846).
3 All References in this form are to Rodger L. Tarr and Mark Engel (eds), Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh (Berkeley, 2000).
Both indirectly and directly Thomas Carlyle refers to Thomas Reid. But if Reid influenced Carlyle and he in turn transmitted to his much more extensive readership elements of Reid’s thought, this suggests numerous literary-philosophical genealogies beyond Reid—connections between Reidian philosophy and the vastly broader cultural spectrum of the nineteenth century. This is an exciting and daunting prospect because it involves the development of new critical narratives of the philosophical/intellectual history of Scotland during the nineteenth century within a more extensive international and interdisciplinary sphere of discourse. But tracing some of the countless strands within the unbounded ‘beyond’ of such a post-Enlightenment literary mediation of Reid’s philosophy to discover or enable the extent to which Scottish thought permeates the broader fabric of literature and culture, one is immediately confronted by the problem of a prevailing indifference towards this subject. Pioneering work has certainly begun on recovering the evolving story of Scottish philosophy during the nineteenth century. But it will take an enormous effort to redress the cultural and historical deficit in Scotland and reverse the current ignorance about the history of the after-effects of Scottish Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy, even though such work temptingly promises to evolve Scottish thought as a phenomenon of continuing international relevance. Not only are most of the leading figures of Scotland’s intellectual life during the nineteenth century names that virtually no-one knows or cares about (such as Sir William Hamilton), but even Carlyle, one of Scotland’s most internationally influential writers, has been relegated to the outer margins. As Paul Kerry rightly points out, Carlyle ‘is threatened with marginalization within [recent] Victorian studies discourse’. Yet, for a sustained period Carlyle was astonishingly famous and the huge extent of his influence was widely acknowledged, even though he was often regarded with suspicion as one who wrote from the wilderness in a highly idiosyncratic style against some characteristic aspects of modernity.


6 Paul Kerry, ‘Editor’s Preface’, *Literature and Belief*, 25 (1&2), (2005), ix–xi (p.ix). Kerry is referring to an observation made by Dinah Birch of the University of Liverpool.
Recent assessments of Carlyle’s influence amply demonstrate some of the ways in which his work deeply permeated the literature and culture of Britain and several other countries, but such assessments suggest that there is still a great deal of work to be done to discover the fuller extent of his legacy in Britain, America, Canada, the European Continent, India, and China.7 Furthermore, as the projected 45-volume publication of *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle* approaches its end (with well over 30 volumes currently available online),8 and as the definitive, scholarly Strouse edition gradually establishes selected Carlyle texts, his cultural significance may re-emerge through the enhanced possibility of reassessments that could interrelate his work with some of the strong currents of intellectual debate that run through that long Enlightenment period from the seventeenth century to the present day. In France, where surprisingly (given Carlyle’s great interest in French literature and history) his work did not flourish during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as Catherine Heyrendt has recently argued, there may be some potential for this situation to change in the future. She claims that were the ‘French dimension of his maturation and work better known, it would become clearer that Carlyle’s thought is by no means a vindication … of authoritarianism, elitism, or German supremacy’, which have been among the main reasons for Carlyle’s marginalization since before the Second World War.9

Though Carlyle’s reputation waxed and waned during his lifetime, he was accorded recognition in at least one Scottish-led tribute when in 1875, to celebrate his eightieth birthday, a substantial number of eminent scholars and writers presented him with a medal struck by Jacob Boehm and a rather effusive statement commemorating his status.10 A fair proportion of the 119 signatories on that birthday tribute were philosophers, many of them

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9 Catherine Heyrendt, ‘“My books were not, nor ever will be popular”: Reappraising Carlyle In and Through France’, in Paul E. Kerry and Marylu Hill (eds), *Thomas Carlyle Resartus: Reappraising Carlyle’s Contribution to the Philosophy of History, Political Theory, and Cultural Criticism* (Madison, NJ, 2010), 170–86; see especially 182–3 and 172–6.

Scottish: John Caird and Sir Alexander Grant (the Principals of Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities), Alexander Bain, Edward Caird, Henry Calderwood, Robert Flint, Alexander Campbell Fraser (author of a short biography of Reid), James Hutchison Stirling, and John Veitch (biographer and editor of the works of Sir William Hamilton and professor of Logic and Rhetoric at Glasgow). A few of these Scottish philosophers expressed specific indebtedness to Carlyle.\(^{11}\) For example, Stirling (author of *The Secret of Hegel*) declared that ‘neither Hume nor Voltaire, nor any other, ever strook through his contemporaries with such light and lightening as Carlyle….he is Carlyle the Only.’\(^{12}\)

If it is the case that Carlyle is as influential, as the points above loosely indicate, then his relationship to the Scottish philosophical tradition is of critical importance and the fact that he was a friend of Hamilton, who from 1830 was Reid’s most forceful advocate, is without doubt significant. But do aspects of Carlyle’s response to or adaptations of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy permeate nineteenth-century literature and culture? This is far too big a question to tackle in a single discussion; influence is rarely simple, and only genuinely interesting when understood in its complexity. However, provocatively: if Reid influenced at least some aspect of Carlyle’s work and if Carlyle influenced Charles Dickens (as he undoubtedly did), has something of Reid’s philosophical stance been transmitted into the novel explicitly dedicated by Dickens to Carlyle, *Hard Times*? As Hilary Schor asserts, ‘*Hard Times* is the Dickens novel that asks most clearly to be read not as a mere fictional world but as a commentary on a contemporary crisis’ and its connection with Carlyle’s work is in a number of respects fairly evident.\(^{13}\) However, just as, when millions of nineteenth-century viewers looked in wonderment at the pre-Raphaelite representation of Christ in William Holman Hunt’s famous painting ‘The Light of the World’, they were unknowingly gazing upon a modern representation of Carlyle’s face (since he had been the unwitting sitter for Hunt), is it the case that countless readers of Dickens have been conditioned by certain attitudes, values, and beliefs informed by Dickens’s


close friend Carlyle, who in turn was re-presenting elements of Scottish thought traceable to Reidian philosophy?14

Though Carlyle does not say much about Scottish philosophers directly, there are certain strong suggestions that he was acutely aware of the prodigious intellectual and social significance of the Scottish Enlightenment, and of the presence of its legacy during the third decade of the nineteenth century. This is abundantly evident in a pronouncement made by a character in his unfinished novel, ‘Wotton Reinfred’: ‘everywhere, disguise it as we may — in the senate, the press, the pulpit, the parlour, and the market — David Hume is ruler of the world’.15 Written in 1827 but only published posthumously in 1892, this declaration seems to be echoed by James Hutchison Stirling in 1864: ‘Hume is our Politics, Hume is our Trade, Hume is our Philosophy, Hume is our Religion—it wants little but Hume were even our Taste’.16 If, as Cairns Craig asserts, Stirling’s remark indicates something of the pervasiveness of Hume’s influence around the middle of the nineteenth century, it is also significant that Carlyle penned such a remark some 37 years earlier. However, publicly, yet more elusively, he uses a similar rhetorical formula for referring to Hume’s scepticism when he writes, in ‘Signs of the Times’ (1829), of how the laws of mechanism (that Carlyle identifies with the Lockean theory of ideas and with Hume’s damaging effect on Reidian philosophy) predominate ‘in the closet, in the marketplace, in the temple, by the social hearth’.17

These references to Hume’s scepticism in Carlyle’s writing occur shortly before Hamilton’s tempestuous critique of Brown and his intensive, critical defence of Reid in his ‘Philosophy of Perception’ (1830) (for example, see Hamilton, 43–5; 56–7). For Hamilton, Humean scepticism was, in a sense, flourishing, largely due to Brown’s misinterpretations and excessive popularity. Since there were more obvious targets (such as John Wilson), perhaps Hamilton’s attack on Brown as the principal cause of the return of Hume’s scepticism needs to be thought of as a mark of respect for Brown’s ability and the great extent of his influence.18 However, evidently there was a lot at stake

18 For example, though clearly a barbed comment and part of Hamilton’s double-edged
in Hamilton’s judgment that Scotland had failed to maintain and develop the Reidian answer to Hume (for example, see Hamilton, 43–5). In ‘Philosophy of Perception’ Hamilton regards the deplorably inept and complacent state of British philosophical competence—the pervasive ‘indifference’ towards metaphysics—as having been caused by Brown’s failure at a most fundamental level to understand and defeat Hume’s scepticism (Hamilton, 43; 56–7; 86; 88; 94). Carlyle effectually agrees with Hamilton’s judgment that, by the late 1820s, Hume’s scepticism was prevailing over the intellectual impoverishment at the heart of the demise of British metaphysics and moral philosophy. But Carlyle’s implicit agreement with Hamilton in his unpublished ‘Wotton’ re-emerges a few years later in his much more famous Sartor Resartus, in which Hume’s presence, though more thickly disguised, is nonetheless more potent as Carlyle absorbs Hamilton’s unforgiving definition of Hume’s scepticism as the most extreme form—Pyrrhonism.

As briefly suggested by Hamilton, Hume’s Pyrrhonism is a scepticism that defeats everything by admitting as equally powerful all directly opposing standpoints—the position of equipollence (Hamilton, 94–5). This is a form of scepticism that entails nihilism. To be sure, the extreme, equipollent sceptic may claim that, if for every proposition there is some negation of it that has equal strength, this results in a condition of calmness and relief from the anxiety of having to maintain a particular standpoint. However, against such an attempt to claim a beneficent consequence of equipollence, the position of complete indeterminacy is, arguably, pessimistic since, for example, it destroys the possibility of virtually any form of productive argumentation; there can be no preferred conclusion and (thinking of a dialogic model of argumentation), there can be no satisfactory, albeit provisional, resolution of some original conflict of opinion—all discourse, compacts or agreements, activity, and thereby all human life are put in jeopardy by the prevalence of an absolute Pyrrhonism explicitly defined in this way. Equipollence may not imply such inertia in fact, but it is at least hard to see how a genuine commitment to act in such and such a way could exist, or how we might be thought of as being bound to adhere to such and such an agreement, and so on. Hume certainly claims that were the Pyrrhonist’s principles to obtain this would entail stasis and the end of all human life. But then, quite suavely, he seems to reject this rhetorical strategy to demolish Brown, he mentions ‘the high ability and higher authority of Dr Brown’ (Hamilton, 43–4). On the extent of Brown’s influence and popularity, see Thomas Dixon, ‘Introduction’, in Thomas Dixon (ed.), Thomas Brown: Selected Philosophical Writings, (Exeter and Charlottesville, 2010), 1–30, especially 1–6).
possibility by saying that ‘so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded. Nature is always too strong for principle’.19

However, it seems that Hamilton did not take this on face value. Hume’s admission that ‘Nature is always too strong for principle’ arguably equates humanity with the merely animal half of Aristotle’s famous definition of man as a rational animal. Something of this is present in Reid when he says in the Inquiry that while we have certain powers:

in common with the brutes, and which are necessary to the preservation of the individual, or the continuance of the kind. There are other powers, of which nature hath only planted the seeds in our minds, but hath left the rearing of them to human culture. It is by the proper culture of these, that we are capable of all those improvements in intellectuals, in taste, and in morals, which exalt and dignify human nature; while on the other hand, the neglect or perversion of them makes its degeneracy and corruption. (Reid, 98).

If by ‘Nature is always too strong for principle’ Hume means that the powers we have in common with the brutes—mere survival instincts, or the impulsions of lust—will always be too strong for principle, then this may be read as an encoded indictment of humanity, the articulation of a powerfully ironic assertion of (brute) Nature’s superiority (albeit one that is perhaps overly ungracious towards brutes and the lusts of the flesh that we share with them in common). A few sections further on from the above quotation, Reid refers to certain philosophical positions, most notably including the sceptical subversion that indicts the senses and mental faculties as fallacious. Of such a philosophical theory—and Hume is clearly being referred to here—Reid gives a strong hint of his awareness of Hume’s irony: ‘It can have no other tendency, than to shew the acuteness of the sophist, at the expense of disgracing reason and human nature, and making mankind Yahoos’ (Reid, 102).

Reid’s reference to Yahoos significantly brings Hume’s Treatise into close relation with the very archetype of eighteenth-century irony: Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels, one of the most rhetorically brilliant, humorous, yet profoundly bleak satires of mankind and reason ever written. Following Reid’s insightful lead, Gulliver’s Travels can be read as the literary precursor to its philosophical counterpart, Hume’s Treatise. The synergy between these

literary and philosophical texts, that to his credit Reid here initiates, intimates something of the pivotal role of Reid’s great concern for human dignity and the inherent threat to this within Hume’s scepticism. The Yahoos in *Gulliver’s Travels* are utterly deplorable, repulsive, sub-human slaves to their insatiable bodily appetites, and to their masters’ cold controlling reason and sheer physical superiority. Reid’s reference to ‘Yahoos’ is a highly condensed way of communicating the idea that Hume’s metaphysical/epistemological argument is effectually re-writing the human condition as atrociously absurd. But, to link Hume with Swift in this way also suggests that Hume’s use of language is pervasively ironic, thereby tainting every assertion or move in his argumentation as unstable. Reid’s allusion to Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* hints at an acutely insightful grasp of the astonishing brilliance and destructiveness of Hume’s Pyrrhonical scepticism, while simultaneously subverting his position as unreliably ironic.

In *Gulliver’s Travels* the Yahoos appear to symbolise humankind degraded to a sub-human condition, stripped of all dignity, and utterly foul in their degeneracy and selfishness (for example, see *GT*, 237–8; 244–5; 277–9).²⁰ Importantly, Gulliver is in several places likened to a Yahoo, much to his own disgust, and he also comes to regard human beings as Yahoos (*GT*, 316–17). Of equal importance, Gulliver discriminates between himself and the Yahoos as inferior to him, and he describes the enslavers of the Yahoos, the horse-like Houyhnhnms, as his and mankind’s superiors. But Gulliver therefore stands between Yahoo and Houyhnhnm. Swift’s pervasive irony and stark contradictions between the Yahoos’s bestial impulsiveness and the steely coldness and unfeeling callousness of their Houyhnhnm masters is tantamount to an absolute condemnation of the human condition. For, Gulliver is not a Yahoo but rather he finally stands hopelessly, insanely, deluded in his division between the two states or conditions of existence represented by the degenerate, bestial, purely instinctual Yahoo slaves, and the icily rational, passionless, amoral Houyhnhnms masters. Preposterously mimicking horses in his speech and deportment and, like the greatest of clowns, unaware of how this signifies his ridiculousness and insanity, Gulliver latterly fancies himself much closer to the Houyhnhnms than to his wife or his fellow man (*GT*, 298; 306; 310–311). This injects the severity of Swift’s satirical and irrefutable, inescapable and viral irony. Gulliver is, like the most excellent caricatures, a practical impossibility, a wholly theoretic or linguistic construction, and his

²⁰ All references in this form are to Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, with an introduction by Pat Rogers (London, 1991).
profound unreliability as a narrator sows doubt in the reader that has the potential to become absolute. The embodiment of humanity’s self-deluded, self-subverting, and thereby entirely doomed and hopeless or impossible condition, this caricature nevertheless seems to be conveying a deep and inescapable truth—therein the fallacy, therein the seductive persuasiveness that makes the fallacy potentially dangerous.

According to Reid, Hume sets Reason in direct conflict with common sense (for example, Reid, 101; 139; 183). The warfare of Reason and Common Sense that Reid refers to might otherwise be described as that nihilistic absolute scepticism of equipollence; Reason undermines Common Sense and vice versa. And this is virtually how Hamilton defines Hume’s scepticism—as a system of mutually undermining opposites resulting in absolute uncertainty or indeterminacy (Hamilton, 94–5). Though neither Reid nor Hamilton explicitly identifies Hume’s irony as being of a piece with his equipollent or Pyrrhonical scepticism, it is a simple step to take to read Hume’s numerous ironical remarks as rhetorical devices consistent with the equipollence of the mutually subverting or contradicting Reason and Common Sense that describes his Pyrrhonism. Once the reader sees irony deeply infused into Hume’s argumentation, the phrase in his objection to the practical possibility of Pyrrhonism—‘Nature is always too strong for principle’—is transformed to a merely apparent objection to Pyrrhonism. It thus no longer functions as a satisfactory move in an argument supporting a mitigated scepticism. Instead of operating as a premise in support of what later looks like Hume’s advocacy of mitigated scepticism, Hume’s irony turns ‘Nature is always too strong for principle’ into an intensification of the concept that the true state of affairs for the human condition is one in which there can be no escape from the deadly indeterminacy—the equipollence—of mutually subverting reason and common sense; humanity is thereby convicted of self-delusion, pivoted in stasis on the moment of equilibrium. This is, for Hamilton, the very essence of uncertainty.

Carlyle is often a great purveyor of uncertainty. All too often thought of disparagingly as a dogmatist, on closer inspection he is rather a generator of aporia.21 Challenging his reader to realise the complexity of existence, eschew complacency, and become an active participant in generating or perceiving the great manifold of meaning in existence, Carlyle’s writing seems to have a peculiar affinity with Hamilton’s definition of Hume’s absolute scepticism as

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Carlyle repeatedly positions his reader within the chaos of competing ideas and in struggle with the apparently inescapable dominance of prevalent ideology.\(^{22}\) However, in response to the dilemmatic nature of the human condition that he characterises, Carlyle resorts to a reiteration of the importance of human agency to break free from the ‘chains of our own forging’ and thereby reclaim the soul’s connection with the ‘fair heavenly country’ from which mechanism and materialism have isolated us.\(^{23}\) He raises the spectre of Hume and the paralysing condition of Enlightenment scepticism as the nightmare haunting humanity in the early post-Enlightenment period of rapidly advancing industrialism and materialism. But, he counters such scepticism as a truth of the human condition, or as a propædeutic consciousness that we must acknowledge or assimilate, yet strive to overcome or sublate.

At times Carlyle seems to have regarded the eighteenth century as an epoch largely defined by its scepticism and materialism, a godless age of atheism or unbelief in which humanity had shrunk to something mean and unheroic:

> The Eighteenth was a *Sceptical* Century; in which little word there is a whole Pandora’s Box of miseries. Scepticism means not intellectual **Doubt** alone, but moral **Doubt**; all sorts of **infidelity**, insincerity, spiritual paralysis … Heroism was gone forever; Triviality, Formulism and Commonplace were come forever …

> How mean, dwarfish are their ways of thinking, in this time …\(^{24}\)

In characterising scepticism as ‘paralysis’, Carlyle was following the lead of a number of other Scottish writers, including Hume and Reid, who could at times portray extreme/absolute scepticism as leading to a profound state of melancholia or depression. For example, in the *Inquiry*, Reid claims that certain sceptical theories of human nature ‘tend to slacken every nerve of the soul, to put every noble purpose and sentiment out of countenance, and spread a melancholy gloom over the whole face of things’ (Reid, 127). Similar utterances can be found in several of Carlyle’s works—for example (and as noted earlier, referring to Hume) in ‘Signs of the Times’ he writes: “The deep meaning of the Laws of Mechanism lies heavy on us;” and in the

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\(^{22}\) For example, see Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, 155–8; Lowell T. Frye, ‘History as Biography, Biography as History’, in *Thomas Carlyle Resartus*, 133–47 at 134.

\(^{23}\) Carlyle, ‘Signs of the Times’, 80–1.

\(^{24}\) Carlyle, ‘The Hero as Man of Letters,’ *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, &
the Heroic in History* (Berkeley, 1993), 133–67 at 147.
closet, in the marketplace, in the temple, by the social hearth, encumbers the whole movements of our mind, and over our noblest faculties is spreading a nightmare sleep. More dramatically, in *Sartor Resartus* Carlyle figures scepticism as having become so absolute in its destructive effects on the text’s principal character, that Teufelsdröckh declares: ‘To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference, to grind me limb from limb.’ *(Carlyle, SR, 124)*.

But, while Carlyle emphasises the apocalyptic implications of the absolute scepticism of the eighteenth century, in *Heroes and Hero-Worship* he also stresses the perennial nature of the tension between scepticism and belief as an integral aspect of the human condition: ‘the battle of Belief against Unbelief is the never-ending battle!’ Furthermore, he goes on to assert the comparatively temporary nature of scepticism’s paralysing effects: ‘Scepticism, as sorrowful and hateful as we see it, is not an end but a beginning’. Though such an optimistic notion of scepticism leading to a new beginning is also present in the earlier *Sartor Resartus*, and can be traced in both Reid’s *Inquiry* and Stewart’s *Dissertation*, Carlyle seems to have been acutely conscious of the power of Hume’s scepticism. He writes in his review article on Sir Walter Scott in 1838 of ‘the colossal Scepticism of a Hume’. This acknowledgement of the ‘colossal’ dimensions of Hume’s scepticism may be an acceptance of its great overshadowing power, a gigantic force impervious to the attacks by Carlyle’s predecessors such as the philosophers of the Scottish School of Common Sense, and Kant.

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> Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a Colossus, and we petty men
> Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
> To find ourselves dishonourable graves.
> Men at some time are masters of their fates:
> The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
> But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

*(Julius Caesar, I.ii.135–41)*
Carlyle’s distinctly indirect response to Hume involves an assimilation of Humean nihilistic scepticism in *Sartor Resartus*, that deflects scepticism to generate, out of the paralysis of Pyrrhonism, the very thing that he regards Hume’s project as tending to destroy, namely, wonder. That is to say, in Carlyle’s hands, the atomistic assumption of Hume’s science of man, seen by both Carlyle and Reid as tending towards darkness, despair, and the annihilation of our humanity, is not subjected to an attempted refutation but rather deflected or transformed by Carlyle into a renewed source of fascination and wonderment. An example of this occurs in ‘The World Out of Clothes’ chapter of *Sartor Resartus* where one of Teufelsdröckh’s musings on metaphysics includes the peroration: ‘WE are—we know not what;—light-sparkles floating in the æther of Deity!’ (Carlyle, *SR*, 43). This comes shortly after a possible allusion to the principle of contiguity referred to in Hume’s famous example of billiard balls.\(^{29}\) Carlyle may be alluding to Reid’s *Inquiry* where Hume’s *Treatise* is described as ‘the forbidden tree of knowledge; I no sooner taste of it, than I perceive myself naked, and stript of all things, yea even of my very self. I see myself, and the whole frame of nature, shrink into fleeting ideas, which, like Epicurus’s atoms, dance about in emptiness’. (Reid, 103).\(^{30}\) Though there is arguably more than a hint of fascination in Reid’s description, Carlyle’s ‘light-sparkles floating in the æther of Deity!’ is altogether more spiritual, magical, wonderful, expansive. It is as though Carlyle has transformed Reid’s more foreboding description of what Humean scepticism leads to by re-crafting the inherently chilling thought of complete disconnection and isolation into an aesthetically beautiful image concerning our ignorance—‘WE are—we know not what’. In several places close to Reid’s mention of Epicurus’s atoms he also insists on the limitation of our knowledge, and elsewhere in Reid’s work there is a distinct reliance upon or recourse to ignorance or cognitive limitation to rebut the legitimacy of theorising about what lies beyond our ken.\(^{31}\)

There may be more traces from Reid’s *Inquiry* in Carlyle’s work, such as his reference in ‘Signs of the Times’ to Jacques de Vaucanson’s puppet and digesting duck, where he also refers to Martinus Scriblerus, a pseudonym of Alexander Pope, from where Carlyle derives the phrase (which he attributes to Swift) to describe man with satirical humour in *Sartor Resartus*, as a ‘forked straddling animal with bandy legs’ (Carlyle, *SR*, 44; 284n). In the *Inquiry* Reid


\(^{30}\) Compare, Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, 187.

\(^{31}\) See Jessop, *Carlyle and Scottish Thought*, 95–9.
refers to a puppet being quite inferior to the deep complexity of a human being and it seems very likely that he is alluding to Vaucanson’s once famous attempted mechanical replication in the late 1730s of animal functions (Reid, 103).32 A few pages before this, Reid also describes man as ‘The two-legged animal that eats of nature’s dainties’ (Reid, 98). But whether Carlyle is re-working materials found in Reid or in sources they shared in common in eighteenth-century literature, he seems to be bringing together two types of scepticism, the first Humean and the second Reidian.

Carlyle’s understanding of scepticism in these two forms probably came from talking with and reading the work of his friend Hamilton, whose definition of Hume’s Pyrrhonical scepticism, coupled with Reid’s linkage of Hume with Swift, as discussed above, suggests reconsiderations of Hume’s scepticism in relation to the devastating indeterminacy of equipollence as rhetorically reinforced or realised by Hume’s irony. But if the ironic, equipollent scepticism of Hume and of Swift’s satire before him, can be read as counter-cultural forms of scepticism that challenge dogmatism, religious and moral principles, and the century’s vaunted faith in Reason, by contrast with such a discourse of extreme scepticism, Hamilton resurrects an alternative counter-cultural form of scepticism that was also present in eighteenth-century literature and philosophy. In Hamilton’s Law of the Conditioned he provides the epistemological theory that underpins his important doctrine concerning the extreme limitation of human cognition, a doctrine of learned ignorance or of developing a consciousness of one’s nescience. Hamilton attempts to demonstrate in his later work that a long tradition of thinkers, ancient and modern, subscribed to this notion (see Hamilton, 634–49). Intriguingly, the second of Hamilton’s quotations illustrating the notion of learned ignorance had been used before him by Carlyle, the quotation from Shakespeare’s The Tempest, which Carlyle gives as: ‘We are such stuff/ As Dreams are made of, and our little Life/ Is rounded with a sleep!’ (Carlyle, SR, 195; Hamilton, 634).33

Hamilton at no point indicates that this doctrine of nescience is a sceptical doctrine. Rather, he describes it as a heuristic process, the eventual accomplishment of which is a learned ignorance, ‘the consummation, of knowledge’ (Hamilton, 38). And yet, to insist on cognitive limitation and the extremely small domain of direct perceptions is a highly sceptical position. But what the Hamiltonian doctrine of nescience appears to avoid and attempts

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to displace is Hume’s Pyrrhonism. It is as though Hamilton, in attempting to counter extreme German Rationalism, the eclectic philosophy of Victor Cousin, and (due to Brown’s misrepresentation of Reid) the return of Hume’s scepticism as manifested in a dangerous indifference towards metaphysics, is so beleaguered by lethal metaphysical positions that he needs to be almost as extremely sceptical as Hume in order to defeat such philosophically and socially disastrous theories of the mind. However, Hamilton’s scepticism deftly slips by undetected, under the guise of that pious wisdom of learning and of acknowledging, with humility, and as a result of the most arduous philosophical study, the great extent of one’s ignorance through the realisation of humanity’s cognitive limitation.

Hamilton’s agnostic move runs against the overly-ambitious philosophical trends he identifies in the philosophy of Victor Cousin, the German extreme Rationalists, and the absolute uncertainty of Hume’s Pyrrhonism. However, Hamilton’s agnostic move comes close in its potential severity to the Humean form of scepticism, which is disastrous for philosophical (reasonable) discourse, and which is theoretically inadmissible because it entails a condition of stasis that profoundly threatens all action and vitality. But, by comparison with the extreme uncertainty of equipollent Humean Pyrrhonism (as defined by Hamilton), Hamilton’s emphases on nescience appear to avoid the disastrous consequences of the absolute, nihilistic character of Pyrrhonism. So understood, it would seem that, as Hamilton attempts to resurrect Reidian philosophy, he implicitly, if not conspicuously, resurrects Hume’s Pyrrhonism as a philosophical position of continuing danger. But, if Hamilton’s Reid-inspired metaphysical definition of Humean absolute scepticism (as a system of equipollence or self-refuting valences), in theory determines the complete annihilation of humanity, such an understanding of Hume as the gravest threat to discourse, to civilisation, and to the viability of human existence itself, interestingly morphs in the middle of the nineteenth-century into a similarly distressing scientific theory of thermodynamics that predicted the end of the universe, the end of all existence.

Craig has recently argued that in the mid-nineteenth century the new science of thermodynamics implied ‘a dissipation of the universe’s energy which would inevitably result in its disintegration to a condition in which energy was equally spread across space, and activity of all kinds would cease’.34 Commenting on this new scientific theory, Carlyle’s close friend, David

34 Craig, Intending Scotland, 101.
Masson (who pointedly linked Carlyle and Hamilton),35 sketched the scene of universal death that the new science foretold by using the chilling phrase of a resultant ‘indistinguishable equilibrium of ruin’.36 This equilibrium is perhaps best thought of as a temporally extensive process of equilibration ending in equilibrium, and hence in the stasis of energy that equates with universal death. Completely contrary to Christian belief, this new theory of thermodynamics foretells the end of the entire universe, the physically inevitable destruction of God’s creation. However, in the previous century, Hume had enounced a similar stasis, implying the more or less rapid but finally absolute end of all human existence. Though Hume’s theoretical point was not applied to the physical universe, but instead to human existence, some such notion—of a ruinous equilibrium, or fatal stasis—is projected by Hume in the first Enquiry as the ultimate consequence of the absolute scepticism of Pyrrhonism:

[A Pyrrhonian] must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence.37

If Hamilton had taken the sentence that follows this—Hume’s assertion that ‘Nature is always too strong for principle’—as a sufficient negation of Hume’s Pyrrhonism, then he would not have defined Hume’s scepticism as the placing of ‘Speculation and practice, nature and philosophy, sense and reason, belief and knowledge … in mutual antithesis, [to] give, as their result, the uncertainty of every principle’ (Hamilton, 95). Carlyle also seems to have shared this view that the equipollence of absolute Humean scepticism implied a fatal stasis and a resultant extinction of existence. For example, in one place he describes scepticism as applied to the moral domain as ‘a chronic atrophy and disease of the whole soul’.38

The gloomy prognoses surrounding Hume’s scepticism had fatally introduced a corded discourse of notions concerning humanity’s woefully unstoppable self-annihilation originating in a self-division of mutually

35 David Masson, Recent British Philosophy: A Review with Criticisms including some Comments on Mr Mill’s Answer to Sir William Hamilton (London, 1877, 3rd edn), 69. Also quoted by Jessop, Carlyle and Scottish Thought, 9; and see Craig, Intending Scotland, 86–7.
36 Quoted by Craig, Intending Scotland, 102.
37 Hume, Enquiries, 160.
38 Carlyle, ‘Hero as Man of Letters,’ Heroes, 150.
destructive valences. But if the theoretical co-ordinates that pattern Hume’s Pyrrhonism are the same or closely similar to the newfound notion of everything running down and ending in an ‘indistinguishable equilibrium of ruin’, then it seems likely that Carlyle and Hamilton played an important part, albeit unintentionally, in extending Scottish philosophical traditions concerned with Humean scepticism to inform how the implications of equilibration inherent in the new science of thermodynamics would be understood. As regarded by Reid, Hamilton, Carlyle, and wittingly or unwittingly translated by Masson into an explication of the thermodynamic theory’s implications of universal death, Humean scepticism can of course be traced into many other spheres as uncertainty grew and indeterminacy increasingly became one of dominant notions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But, if Hume, Reid, Carlyle, and Hamilton can be read as playing key roles in shaping a language, of mutual annihilation or self-cancelling equipollence, for envisioning a cataclysmic end of existence through an equilibrium of energies, Reid’s response to Hume’s scepticism and the part played by both Hamilton and Carlyle also shaped another counter-cultural strand of discourse that similarly flourishes in unexpected quarters. By renewing an alternative discourse of nescience, inherent in Reid and yet with both ancient roots and more modern articulations, Carlyle and, more explicitly, Hamilton, articulated a standpoint or fundamental principle concerning the vast limitation of our knowledge that at once enjoins humanity’s dependence on faith/trust and the critical importance of the virtue of humility with regard to human cultivation and learning. For Carlyle, the notion of nescience clearly became profoundly important and it permeates a great deal of his work.39

Much has yet to be written about the role that a particular emphasis on nescience plays in Reid and the Scottish philosophical tradition, in the work of Hamilton, Carlyle, in the rise of agnosticism during the nineteenth century, in its pre-Reidian literary manifestations in, for example, Alexander Pope’s Essay on Man, and in the work of numerous authors inspired by Carlyle.40 As a broadly counter-cultural scepticism of the long enlightenment, the stance or attitude that stresses cognitive limitation and in turn the vastness of human

39 For example, see Jessop, Carlyle and Scottish Thought, 187–95; Ruth apRoberts, ‘Carlyle and the History of Ignorance’, Carlyle Studies Annual, 18 (1998), 73–81 at 77; ‘The Historian as Shandean Humorist: Carlyle and Frederick the Great’, in David R. Sorenson and Rodger L. Tarr (eds), The Carlyles at Home and Abroad (Hampshire, UK, 2004), 15–26 at 15.

ignorance, stands in opposition to a number of cultural trends including the rising power of materialism, an increasingly exaggerated faith in scientific knowledge and material progress, an absolutist assumption of the possibility of human omniscience, and the tendency of Humean scepticism and of some Romantic literature towards nihilism. Expressed by Carlyle as, ‘they only are wise who know that they know nothing’ (Carlyle, SR, 42), if the Hamiltonian renewal of the assertion of learned ignorance played some such counter-cultural role, it begins to bring Carlyle, Hamilton, and thereby that critical strand in Enlightenment thought of Reidian philosophy, into meaningful relationship with much broader cultural tendencies, inter-textual connections spanning centuries, and the cultural politics involved in literature and art in depicting humanity as noble, wondrous; ‘the paragon of animals’ that Hamlet so famously pauses to consider as he upholds the wonder of man that for him has been whelmed by the gloom of his sceptically-induced melancholia – ‘What a piece of work is a man! […] And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?’

The Enlightenment legacy curiously involved a double helix of counter-cultural sceptical positions integral to the battle of the two philosophies of Hume’s Pyrrhonism and Reid’s common sense, interlocked in fraught tension with one another, but both running against certain prevailing values and beliefs. Hamilton’s long list of others who to varying extent subscribed to the importance of knowing that we not only cannot be omniscient but rather that we exist largely in an inescapable condition of ignorance, amply demonstrates that a doctrine of ignorance/nescience is by no means an exclusively Scottish philosophical notion. However, the emphasis given to this by Hamilton and Carlyle certainly suggests that the reawakening to nescience that occurred during the nineteenth century was given a new impetus by these two thinkers, both of whom had been strongly drawn to the literature and philosophy of Germany, and in particular to Kant. Hamilton quotes Kant as testament to the notion of cognitive limitation (more specifically the relativity of knowledge), adding ‘And a hundred testimonies to the same truth might be adduced from the philosopher of Koenigsberg, of whose doctrine it is, in fact, the foundation.’ (Hamilton, 647). So, bearing in mind something of the complexity of transnational connections involved in tracing comparative emphases on nescience, while excluding these simply to focus on the Reidian aspect, to return to the question raised earlier: has something of Reid’s philosophical stance been transmitted into Dickens’s *Hard Times*? The answer is ‘yes’.

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Involving a fond celebration of the grubby reality of human imperfection, *Hard Times* fosters belief in the basic moral goodness of ordinary people and the social dangers of indoctrinating knowledge in a school obsessed with utilitarian definition and an absolute regulation of life by ‘fact’ (HT, 7; 9; 30–1).\(^\text{42}\) Sleery’s boozy management of the symbolically alternative world of entertainment and the circus, and his warm humanity and moral worth is brought into conflict with the deadening effects of monotony, uniformity, and mechanical regulation in the workplace, society, and, crucially, in education. Through these characteristics of the text, Dickens portrays not merely a grim industrial townscape but a condition of being that is utterly choked and doomed by Coketown’s symbolic embodiment of *indifference*, the identification of radically dissimilar facets of human life into a deathly/heartless unity, and such a complete balancing out and subjugation of human freedom and vitality as to render the existence of almost all of the characters desperate if not utterly impossible—‘The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else … and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery’ (*HT*, 21). However, if these aspects of the text are to some extent informed by the new horror of an ‘indistinguishable equilibrium of ruin’ (or by the somewhat older dread of the stasis of the Enlightenment’s legacy of ‘spiritual paralysis’ or ‘mechanical impartiality’),\(^\text{43}\) *nescience* also plays a highly significant role in *Hard Times* concerning the whole utilitarian or rigorously instrumental and thus overly constricted and deeply inhumane educational and economic system that the text brilliantly caricatures. The infamous Gradgrind thinks everything must be analysed into discrete units of knowledge, that only what is quantifiable, rationalizable, and capable of being systematized and controlled, constitutes knowledge—a knowledge of objective facts, the value of which resides merely in their enforcement by Gradgrind. Dickens’s text relentlessly mocks the idiocy and inhumanity of this utilitarian approach to knowledge and education, but as the narrative progresses Gradgrind is forced to acknowledge the damage that his system has inflicted on his own daughter, Louisa, who has been dehumanised, de-moralised, emotionally lobotomised, and rendered unimaginative. As the complete failure of Gradgrind’s system dawns on him, the narrator comments:

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\(^\text{42}\) All references in this form are to Fred Kaplan and Sylvère Monod (eds), Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (New York and London, 2001, 3rd edn).

In gauging fathomless deeps with his little mean excise-rod, and in staggering over the universe with his rusty stiff-legged compasses, he had meant to do great things. Within the limits of his short tether he had tumbled about, annihilating the flowers of existence with greater singleness of purpose than many of the blatant personages whose company he kept. (HT, 167).

The banality of Gradgrind’s evil inheres in his grotesquely over-reaching blind confidence in the importance and possibility of quantifying everything to accumulate only useful knowledge. Through Gradgrind’s complete failure to know his own limits and to know the limited condition of human knowledge more generally, he has transformed education into a cruelly ambitious mechanical system that inevitably defeats itself and subverts any claims it might have made concerning its good intentions and its practical worth—though, with bleak realism, the implosion of this educational atrocity only occurs after it has already inflicted great harm.

Dickens’s ‘rusty stiff-legged compasses’ in the above quotation probably has some reference to Carlyle’s use of that similar phrase referred to earlier, that in turn alludes to Alexander Pope’s Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus—this is surely a fitting glance back to eighteenth-century satire and the Enlightenment from whence the Gradgrindian educational system emerged. In addition, Dickens’s use of the figurative ‘excise-rod’ (which may allude to Carlyle’s ‘Burns’), is akin to Carlyle’s use in his ‘Novalis’ of the metaphor of the nautical line for gauging the depth of an ocean. The notion that one’s knowledge is bounded by a fathomless unknown, which this metaphor illustrates, was used by John Locke, Reid, Thomas Brown, Dugald Stewart, no doubt by several others, and is fundamentally a highly apt metaphor for Hamilton’s doctrine of ignorance/nescience. In addition, in the second edition of his Discussions, published one year before Hard Times (1854), Hamilton provides a quotation from Locke as one of his testimonies concerning learned ignorance, in which Locke advocates the wisdom of stopping when the mind is ‘at the utmost extent of its tether’ (Hamilton, 642).

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Dicken shares in the counter-cultural scepticism of human *nescience*, agreeing with Reid ‘that the line of human understanding is too short to reach the bottom of’ certain subjects (Reid, 324), or that ‘There is a deep and a dark gulf between […] mind and body] which our understanding cannot pass’ (Reid, 187). The notion of cognitive limitation in Reid’s philosophy was explicitly and much more prominently used by Carlyle and Hamilton as fundamental to a satisfactory answer to Humean scepticism. Hamilton’s sceptical doctrine of learned ignorance/*nescience* with regard to the ultimately unknowable or incomprehensible ‘fountain of all comprehensibility’ (consciousness), thus inaugurates a counter-cultural stance against the advancing legacy of Hume’s scepticism (Hamilton, 63). Though foundational to the rise of agnosticism and initially articulated in opposition to Victor Cousin and German extreme/absolute Rationalism (Hamilton, 5–7; 13; 37–8), the Hamiltonian emphasis on *nescience*, translated into a broader literary public sphere, also becomes more conspicuously opposed to the expanding materialism, mechanism, and inanity of modernity. This stance against the utilitarian, mechanistic, absolutist appropriation of a dream of omniscience and its implicit displacement of the wisdom of learning one’s ignorance provides Dickens with the theoretical coordinates for his immensely sceptical critique of the hard times imposed upon the human condition through an educational system misguidedly complicit with some of the most deeply flawed characteristics of industrialism. *Hard Times For These Times*, to give the novel its full title, dramatises Dickens’s opposition to the industrialised wasteland of an entirely counterproductive, mechanically ordered, and crushingly regulated system. It may have several sources or affinities beyond the more immediate tributaries of Carlyle and Hamilton but at least one of these can be traced in Reid’s profound social concerns for protecting human dignity from a descent into degradation, the critical role of human cultivation, and for developing a consciousness of the *nescience* of humankind as inescapably integral to any genuine, worthwhile process of that fundamental of societal well-being—education.

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According to historians, the first to introduce Thomas Reid’s thought into France was Pierre Royer-Collard, appointed to the chair of History of Philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1810, and Victor Cousin, his substitute and, at the same time, lecturer at the Ecole Normale. Théodore Jouffroy, Cousin’s student at the Ecole Normale, provided French translations of Reid’s complete works, published in 1828, as well as Dugald Stewart’s *Outlines of Moral Philosophy*, published in 1826. Given the long-standing Paris-centrism of French cultural history, historians have overlooked the fact that during the Enlightenment, Scottish philosophy was introduced into Montpellier’s Medical School by Paul Joseph Barthez, who taught Reid’s common sense principles as applied in medical thought in his lectures during the 1770s. Barthez, always aware of what was published elsewhere in Europe, studied Reid’s *Inquiry on the human mind on the principles of common sense*, in its first French translation, Amsterdam, chez Jean Meyer, 1768.

These Scottish affinities lasted through the nineteenth century in Montpellier’s Medical School, governed by Baconian-Newtonian experimental philosophy and Reid’s common sense principles. Moreover, the wide range reforms and improvements in medical ethics, in agriculture, industry and economics meant that in the mid-nineteenth century, Montpellier’s Medical School was recognized as the best school in France for the training of general practitioners. This distinctive new kind of medical professional would emerge in the mid-eighteenth century from the two leading medical centers of medical training in Europe, Edinburgh and Montpellier.

**Context : Scotland and Languedoc**

Thomas Reid’s and Paul Joseph Barthez’s works are part of a much wider European network of exchange and correspondence, building on the new paradigm of progress in the age of Enlightenment. We do not know if direct relations occurred between Reid and Barthez, but strong common features
are to be found in their geographical, historical and intellectual contexts, producing similar effects: they share the same masters, the same methods, and came to very similar conclusions. In Reid and Barthez’s local contexts, Baconian and Newtonian methods were applied in a fusion of different disciplines, producing the same overall vision of Nature.

Like Scotland, Languedoc was concerned to preserve and celebrate specific aspects of its culture. The States of Languedoc developed political and social forms that supported philosophical thought with deep roots in local intellectual traditions, bridging religion, science and agriculture.

During the sixteenth century, Montpellier was an early bastion of Calvinism. The Reformation made powerful inroads of Protestantism in Languedoc, penetrating deeply into the rural world. By 1560, the majority of the population was Protestant. The influence of Protestant teaching and values was very strong. So that, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Catholic churchmen of Languedoc reformed the network of their colleges and, following a pedagogical model borrowed from Calvinism, produced an ethos in which education was the duty of both parents and churchmen. Meeting in bishop Colbert’s library, we find the main actors in the transformation of the social, scientific and material world in the States of Languedoc. Physicians, surgeons and naturalists, all of them professors of Montpellier’s Medical School, Catholic as well as Protestant, formed the kernel of the Royal Society of Sciences in Montpellier. The Society also brought in members from other disciplines: mathematicians, astronomers, chemists, and engineers. Their activities involved institutional reforms, public works, and public teaching which would provide a model for Montpellier’s University. The intellectual aspirations of these learned men combined an encyclopaedic spirit and local interest, linking art, sciences and technologies. For example, the map of Languedoc that was commissioned from the Society by the States was the most elaborate cartographic work of this time.

The main source of the Diderot-D’Alembert *Encyclopédie* was the prestigious library of Camille Falconet, physician of Montpellier’s medical school, and personal physician to the King. Falconet was a friend to Barthez’s father, Guillaume Barthez, civil engineer of the Province of Languedoc, who was an active member of the Royal Society of Sciences. When Paul Joseph went to Paris, after graduating from Montpellier’s Medical School, Guillaume recommended his son to Camille Falconet. Falconet’s library was the right place for Paul Joseph Barthez to yield to his precocious passion for reading and for study.
Reid and Barthez developed their ideas in colleges characterized by a new era of teachers, appealing to the intellectual capacities of the faithful. Their thought matured in a landscape marked by scientific innovations applied in a spirit of the common good and social responsibility. It is in this spirit that Barthez was educated at the colleges of Christian Doctrine of Narbonne and Toulouse. Their practical humanism is also characteristic of the Scotland in which Reid’s thought unfolded. Reid’s familial context included great scientists from this period of Scottish history, such as the family of the “academic Gregories”, of which his mother was a member. At Marischal College in Aberdeen, Reid was taught by eminent professors, like Maclaurin and Turnbull, who introduced Newton’s Natural Philosophy not only in physics but also in morals. Due to his training, Reid acquired a deep knowledge of a range of disciplines, including mathematics, physics, medicine and botany, before he started writing his *Inquiry*.

From their childhoods, Reid and Barthez received a high level of education, due to the care of both family and churchmen. This education combined theology, literature and sciences. At the age of 16 years, Reid and Barthez possessed a wide range of classical and modern knowledge, that they could unfold simultaneously. From these syntheses, they created new lines of reasoning regarding human nature, built upon their strong beliefs of the perfection of the natural world and the perfectibility of the human mind. Bacon’s disciples, Reid and Barthez undertook the renovation of the science of man: the human being as a “whole” became to them an object of scientific study.

**Cosmos: Newton and Bacon**

In the age of Enlightenment, Reid and Barthez held a unique place in the philosophy of science. They explained Bacon’s and Newton’s rules and applied them to the science of human nature, defining man as a living and thinking being, whose faculties are affected by his milieu, by the natural and cultural environment with which he continually interacts.

During the nineteenth century, Montpellier’s Medical School claimed Newton’s Natural Philosophy, drawn from Bacon’s rules, as the only one it would admit, refusing the Cartesian ‘sectateurs’ of Paris. Barthez’s vital principle doctrine, regarding the relations between mind and body, developed into an entire system of the science of man, the so-called ‘Montpellier’s Double Dynamism’.
Like Bacon and Newton, Reid and Barthez know they have to read the book of Nature. That is to say, to interpret phenomena and to understand the language in which Nature speaks to us. The knowledge of the language of nature thus consists of the interpretation of natural signs, and of discovering the laws of causality within the forms of a nature conceived of as living and intelligent. This knowledge can only be acquired by experience and by the observation of facts that phenomena present to us.

The idea of scientific laws as being inscribed in forms of nature derives from Newton’s experimental philosophy and his Laws of Nature, and the similarity between Reid and Barthez can be seen in the following extracts:

Reid: It is proper to observe, that in the operations of the mind, as well as in those of bodies, we must often be satisfied with knowing that certain things are connected, and invariably follow one another, without being able to discover the chain that goes between them. It is to such connections that we give the name of laws of nature; and when we say that one thing produces another by a law of nature, this signifies no more, but that one thing, which we call in popular language, the cause, is constantly and invariably followed by another, which we call the effect; and that we know not how they are connected.¹

Barthez: It is evident that primary causes cannot be defined in their essence, though we have an ‘interior feeling’ (sentiment intérieur) of their existence. Phaenomena of Nature can only show us the order in which effects follow one another, tell us the rules according to which these effects are produced, and not what constitutes the necessity of this production.²

Reid and Barthez insist upon the fact that when Newton speaks of cause, he is referring not to efficient causes, or supposed causal links, but merely to regular occurrences which can be axiomatized as laws of nature. In the ‘General Scholium’ which he added at the end of the second edition of his *Principia* in 1713, Newton makes clear this central point.

I have not as yet been able to deduce from phenomena the reason for these properties 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. In this experimental philosophy, propositions are deduced from the phenomena and are made general by induction. The impenetrability, mobility, and impetus of bodies, and the laws of motion and the law of gravity have been found by this method. And it is enough that gravity really exists and acts according to the laws which we have set forth and is sufficient to explain all the motions of the heavenly bodies and of our sea.³

Barthez defines his conception of the vital principle of man following Newton’s method, in relation to the active principles that Newton discusses in Query 31 at the end of the Opticks:

Seeing therefore the variety of Motion which we find in the World is always decreasing, there is a necessity of conserving and recruiting it by active Principles, such as are the cause of Gravity, by which Planets and Comets keep their Motions in their Orbs, and Bodies acquire great Motion in falling; and the cause of the Fermentation, by which the Heart and Blood of Animals are kept in perpetual Motion and Heat… For we meet with very little Motion in the World, besides what is owing to these active Principles. And if it were not for these Principles, the Bodies of the Earth, Planets, Comets, Sun and all things in them, would grow cold and freeze, and become inactive Masses; and all Putrefaction, Generation, Vegetation and Life would cease…⁴

In his reformation of the science of man, Barthez goes farther:

Principles is the name I give to experimental causes of phenomena of movement and of life. Thus, I call Vital Principle of man, the cause according to which all phenomena of life are produced in the human body.⁵

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³ Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (Cambridge, 1713; second edn), 484.
⁵ Barthez, *Nouveaux éléments*, 1.
The laws of this principle are like the axioms of the mathematician, who cannot ‘prove’ their truths. This notion of truth is not given us by reason, but by what Barthez calls the ‘sentiment interieur’ (interior feeling). Reid, in the same manner, when defining the first principles of our reasoning about existence, our perceptions, gives them the authority of axioms. For Reid and Barthez, the truth of their principles will override proofs given by reason, because they answer to the design of the Author of Nature.

Both Reid and Barthez, whose texts and thought follow Newton’s philosophy of science regarding the principle of life, define it as ‘the agency of immaterial powers in the human frame’. In order to read what Bacon calls the ‘grammar of the language of nature’, Reid and Barthez proceed by inductive reasoning from analogies with facts that are more familiar in order to apprehend unknown causes, causes ‘occultes’, that is to say not directly known by the visible appearance of external signs. In his science of Indications, or science of signs, by which he determines the method of curing diseases, Barthez takes Newton’s universal algebra as his model. Starting from a configuration of known parameters, this algebra allows him to calculate, according to the laws of the vital principle, the unknown $x$, that is the inner and invisible cause of the disease.

And against Descartes’s conception of the relation between man and Nature—‘we should make ourselves as masters and possessors of nature’—Reid and Barthez return to Hippocrates, whose precept is to listen and to follow nature, a nature from which man is not isolated, but of which he is a part, as a ‘whole’. Reid, speaking about education, refers to Hippocrates’ medicine.

When the education which we receive from men does not give scope to the education of nature, it is wrong directed; it tends to hurt our faculties of perception, and to enervate both the body and mind. Nature hath her way of rearing men, as she hath of curing their diseases. The art of medicine is to follow Nature, to imitate and to assist her in the cure of diseases; and the art of education is to follow Nature, to assist and to imitate her in her way of rearing men.

In the same way, Barthez’s notion of a vital principle will be hurt by remedies.

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that do not respect our proper nature.

In relation to cultural and natural education, both Reid and Barthez quote the same example about savages:

In all sciences, we have to consider a system as a machine we use to rise up higher than we would do without its help. But if from this point of view, systems have advantages, on the other hand, they have the disadvantage of weakening our mind, because they are instruments used by it. So that Savages have a great number of faculties which we lack, due to the great number of instruments we have to provide our needs.8

The education of nature is most perfect in savages, who have no other tutor; and we see, that, in the quickness of all their senses, in the agility of their motions, in the hardness of their constitutions, and in the strength of their minds to bear hunger, thirst, pain, and disappointment, they commonly far exceed the civilized.9

Their common scientific method brings both of them to study human nature according to the same principles. Through an analysis of human faculties, they have built a just system of the simple and original laws of our constitution, and from them, an explanation of the various phenomena of human nature. Our humanity consists in being animated by laws of nature, and at the same time, in being affected by impressions received from the external world.

The art of observing

The main part of medicine is the knowledge and cure of diseases. Barthez underlines it by insisting that the method of curing diseases is the noblest part, and the only purpose of medicine. This knowledge chiefly depends on observation of facts. Medical literature, at the beginning of the Enlightenment, is constituted by a great number of catalogues that simply collect empirical data.

Francis Bacon, in *The Advancement of Learning* published in 1605, had

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8 Paul Joseph Barthez, *Cours de Thérapeutique* (1780), MS H 535, bium Montpellier, 144.
9 Reid, *Inquiry*, 201.
described this state of the medical art:

We see it is accounted an error to commit a natural body to empiric physicians, which commonly have a few pleasing receits whereupon they are confident and adventurous, but know neither the causes of diseases, nor the complexions of patients, nor peril of accidents, nor the true method of cures.\textsuperscript{10}

Following Bacon, Barthez challenges this medical ‘empiricism’:

The physician acts only by instinct, without being able to explain his choice concerning remedies. It would be better for him to know it, he would walk more surely and even could give account of his steps.\textsuperscript{11}

The methodology that Barthez develops in his therapeutic lectures, at Montpellier’s school, parallels the methodologies of work done in Scotland. The creation of the medical school of Edinburgh in 1726 was followed by the creation of the Society for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge in 1731. Headed by Alexander Monro \textit{primus}, the Society publishes the first volume of the \textit{Medical Essays and Observations} in 1732. The Preface gives the reasons for publication: to complain of the abuses in Medicine, whose study is ‘under a Necessity of perusing such Numbers of Books as are wrote on the several Parts of each of them : A labour that can have no End, since one Book serves only as an Introduction to another, while a few Pages might contain all that is new or valuable in most of them’.\textsuperscript{12}

In its pragmatic approach, the \textit{Medical Essays} aims to create a network for sharing, spreading and publishing useful knowledge. ‘The Booksellers whose Names are on the Title-Page are in charge to transmit the papers carefully to the Society’ \textsuperscript{13}, and are from Edinburgh, London, Dublin, Glasgow

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{The advancement of learning and New Atlantis} by Francis Bacon; with a preface by Thomas Case, Oxford University Press, 1906, London, 13.

\textsuperscript{11} Barthez, \textit{Therapeutic Lectures}, 3.


and Amsterdam. The preface presents the concept of the publication, the contents of each volume on the subjects of history, remedies, chemistry, anatomy, animal economy, theory and practice of surgery and physic, creating a reliable scientific database to improve medicine, through Correspondents from Europe and North-America. The Collectors draw formal rules and scientific methods to write observations of natural facts: histories of diseases, epidemics, meteorological registers, which must be candidly and accurately kept locally to ‘also be compared with any Accounts of the same Nature sent from other Places’. The design and usefulness of this work reveals the importance of medicine and natural sciences as a compound of the Scottish Enlightenment knowledge. The reputation of the ‘Mémoires d’Edimbourg’ grows over all Europe and North America, being the main reference of modern knowledge concerning the science of medicine throughout the eighteenth century.

Barthez, like those who contribute to the *Medical Essays*, complains also of self-interest and vanity that are ‘infirmities’ of our minds. On both sides, candour and accuracy are the two qualities required to make good observations. Following Baconian principles applied by Scottish physicians, Barthez combines reason and empiricism. The new medical science has to be formed upon a body of reasoned empiricism.

We now have to consider the sources where we have to find the rules of our conduct. The first of these sources is observation… Everyone sees, but few observe. Because in order to observe, we have to see with reflection… To make good observations, we must read authors, compare their observations with our own, and from these we can lay down general rules; and we have also to consider the modifications due to local context.15

This method of observation is applied in an equal rigor by Reid in his *Inquiry into the human Mind*.

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14 Ibid, xv.
**Medicine and agriculture**

The stress upon local modifications is a characteristic to be found in the *Medical Essays*. It should be noted that the Meteorological Registers used in the knowledge of epidemic diseases are used as well for improvements in agriculture. The emphasis on local concrete singularities and, at the same time, on developing generalized approaches, is characteristic of medicine as well as agriculture, two areas that are equally of concern in Scotland and Languedoc. In both these disciplines the authors are also conscious of being part of a broader, collective work, one which will give solid rational principles to the knowledge of Nature.

In the age of Enlightenment, Nature is the principle that unifies all narratives, and the interpretations of Nature are done within a dynamic and processual approach. For in Nature, elements are never isolated, they are always compounds linked in a process both dynamic and provisional. The Vitalism that Barthez introduces into medical science is part of a broader perspective of vitalizing nature in the Enlightenment.

In agriculture, the first theoretical work is Francois Quesnay’s *Tableau économique*, published in 1758. Surgeon and physician, but born to a farmer family, Quesnay presents agricultural economics as a coherent systemic field, translating the discovery of circulation of the blood into economical activities and exchanges. At the same time, other pragmatic researches are done with the purpose of immediate improvement of agriculture on a more regional level, in Scotland as in Languedoc. Their intention is to promote a reasoned practice of agriculture. The first book of this line is published at the very beginning of the seventeenth century: the *Theatre of Nature* is the work of Olivier de Serres, a Huguenot from the South of France. And values of practical humanism for the common good, are values inherited within a Protestant tradition, a tradition Languedoc shared with Scotland.

Guillaume Barthez’s writings about agriculture are published at the same time as Lord Kame’s works. Both of them are gentlemen-farmers, and they claim that agriculture is the first art. The instructions they give in their works are based on repeated experiments and accurate observation. They combine philosophy and useful practice for the good of their Provinces. Having observed the variety of the soils, of the influence of climate and atmosphere within the Province of Languedoc itself and its history, Guillaume Barthez

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notices that general treatises of agriculture are not calculated for the climate and practices of his province. And from observation and experience alone, in the style of a true physiocrat, he lays down general rules for his Province. In order to explain certain phenomena he observed about bees, he will have recourse to psychological, sociological and moral human values and situations.

Thus, Barthez’s works, like Reid’s, are part of a general vision of Nature as a ‘life of relations’ within which spirit emerges as the chief principle from which the universe is made.

Reid’s definition of ‘acquired perceptions’ and Barthez’s ‘calculus of experience’

Some physicians who by intuition have a kind of divination, recognize at the first aspect the particular character of a disease, and know which symptoms are to be drawn aside, in short, they observe perfectly. It is the effect of a prompt imagination, to see at once all the varieties of a disease, and to form, from their well observed agency, a clear idea of the nature of this disease. And often, there are unperceivable nuances which are closer to the disease that determine the physician in his method of cure.

Thus, we are able to know the dominant conceptus of an illness, and from where it starts, and we feel it, better than we are able to express it, and according to it we are able to combine just analogies, and determinate the true method of cure.17

Conceptus is a word used in biology, referring to the living organism’s design process, at any stage of development from fertilization to birth, including the embryo and extra embryonic membranes. This word used by Barthez shows us the morphological character of his direct approach to perception. When Barthez speaks of imagination, he means an anticipation, a way of visualizing the movements of the illness, in order to lay down a prognosis that has to be a prompt and sagacious decision. Visiting a patient, the perceptual act of the physician is the building of a knowledge affording an action, the cure of an illness; because ‘the purpose of medicine, is the perception of what is to be

done by means of therapy’.\textsuperscript{18}

The original perceptions, increased by the calculus of experience, in the perceptual act itself, are part of a process defined by Victor Rosenthal as \textit{Microgenesis}, a process which develops and stabilizes through dynamic unfolding and differentiation. The phenomenological status of individuated forms acquires, \textit{ipso facto}, value and meaning, and immediately categorizes them on a global dynamic basis in view of prospective action.\textsuperscript{19} When studying the character of an illness and the patient’s nature, Barthez is observing natural phenomena, in a specific relationship with his patient, in which ‘Perception does not consist of internal entities representing the external objects, but rather of an activity directed at them: a direct approach to perception … The very first perceptual (sensory) stage is informative (meaningful)’, in order to grasp in the clearest manner the patient’s nature and the character of the illness. The observer and his environment are complementary.\textsuperscript{20} The concept of nature, here, is defined as ‘that of which we have experience in practice’. Perception, for Barthez as for Reid, has to deal with notions of typicality, of features and notions which are also a process because, since one feature can influence and transform another, there is an unavoidable mobility in these notions. Perception is a mode of orientation in a context.\textsuperscript{21} Barthez insists upon the exploratory aspect of perception. Thus it is not only the diversity of diseases, but also the diversity of the individuals that are the difficulties of his art.

\textbf{Idiosyncrasy – temperaments – habit and custom}

Barthez defines his notion of temperament as ‘being built from nature and habit. The most special aspect of temperament in every human being is idiosyncrasy, or the proper and individual constitution of each person, and

\textsuperscript{18} See Jacques Lordat, ‘Caractéristique du Vitalisme’, in \textit{Essai d'une caractéristique de l'enseignement médical de Montpellier, développée dans les quatre premières leçons du cours de physiologie} (Libraire médicale de Louis Castel, Montpellier, 1843), 11.


consequently different from others. And this constitution cannot be known *a priori*. The power of habit brings modifications to the temperament given by nature. And it is only by experience that the practitioner will be able to get closer to a happy prognostic for the individual person he has to cure.

During his therapeutic lectures, Barthez, like Reid, quotes examples of curious cases concerning the power of habit, taken from common life affairs. Thus the people who are for a long time accustomed to sleep in the neighbourhood of a great noise (as the noise of a mill—or of a city for Reid), then find it difficult to sleep when they can no longer hear this noise.

From the diversity of behaviours and situations in our common lives, Reid and Barthez will found their observations upon primary laws of uniform principles in mankind: laws of human nature based on common sense and careful observations.

Barthez is also a psychologist in relation to his patients: in his view, a physician has to consider the soul as a faculty alongside the other faculties of the living body, its active powers forming part of the vital forces that make agency possible:

> When the delirium is advanced, it is necessary to present to the patient objects which awake his attention, and to recall it to familiar things. One must read some good pieces to a man who loves literature, one must play some pieces of good music to those who appreciate it. All these remedies were known in the past, but are almost neglected today.22

Faithful to Hippocrates in his moral attention to the relation between the physician and his patient, Barthez defines the physician by the pleasure he takes in relieving the patient, and of finding the truth of the reasons for his sorrows and comforting him. The testimony of a good conscience and the pleasure of having done his duty are, for Barthez, the best evidence of a medicine that is useful to the population. But what is useful cannot simply be replicated: just as agriculture must take account of local conditions, so medicine must also be local—indeed, must be unique to the individual physician. So, too, must the teaching of any discipline:

> The most perfect method to teach should be different for every man, because as each individual person has a specific capacity different from

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22 Barthez, *Therapeutic Lectures*, 60.
the others, we should present to him the precepts of all he wants to be well educated in the more analogous manner regarding the degree of energy of his conception, and his faculty of feeling.23

It is Barthez’s art of teaching which would carry his reputation throughout Europe, an art whose perfection was recognized by all French biographers during the nineteenth century.

Barthez’s medical ethics

In the ‘Life of the Author’, written by Paul Joseph’s brother, Antoine Barthez de Marmorières, as an introduction to his collected works,24 we discover the continuing importance of religion in Barthez’s moral values – his first vocation having been the priesthood. It is a characteristic not often highlighted by biographers and historians of medicine. The character presented in this literature is mostly of a hot-tempered, indeed ugly, man. The portrait painted by his brother, on the other hand, reveals a sincere and generous man, who never lied.

He always stood as an enemy of philosophical intolerance which sought to depress men’s piety. He enjoyed deferring his thoughts and hope towards this happy and interminable union of good men, promised by the God of the Christians. He applauded our religious funerals after a death, and sometimes provided the expenses for them; finally he never missed, when seeing one of his patients making profession of Christianity when in imminent danger, to inform his family so that they could provide the consolations and supports of religion to him …

Proud of his medical profession, he practiced it with the greatest dignity. Once he had taken them on as patients, he left everything for them during the day; the dreams of the night returned their presence to him; their return to health gave him the rapture of joy; their death made run his tears.25

23 Barthez, Therapeutic Lectures, 1.
25 Antoine Barthez de Marmorières, Théorie du Beau dans la Nature et les Arts, 40.
Consultant physician to the King and the Duc d’Orléans’s personal physician, Barthez was prompted by prudence to return to his native Province in 1789, when the French Revolution took place. During fifteen years, he healed the population but he took no fees. After having cured contagious diseases, the towns of Narbonne and Perpignan dedicated public actions of recognition to Paul Joseph Barthez. And he would eventually become president of the district council of Aude for two years.

This ethical portrait of Barthez suggests that he is the epitome of the good doctor, who has to put common good over his personal interest, driven by the sense of duty towards his patients. Barthez will teach this medical ethics in his writings and his lectures. His demonstration of the ‘moral and technical superiority of the disinterested gentleman of science’ is based on the same Christian values that were held by John Gregory, to whom Reid was the friend and mentor. It is the same moral that is found in the humanism of Hippocrates, the father of scientific medicine.²⁶ The medical schools of Edinburgh and Montpellier will be characterized by their common art of teaching a practical and human medicine, with a deep sense of public responsibility. It is from this teaching that the modern professional called the ‘general practitioner’ would emerge. We might well ask, therefore, why historians have classified these persons as ‘conservatives’ when in fact they were in the vanguard of their era, while at the same time, carrying forward the humanism of Leonardo da Vinci’s Renaissance.

EHESs, Paris

Vanity and Temptation: Was Thomas Reid a Critic of the Scottish Enlightenment?

Graham McAleer

The leading Continental theorist of moral intuitionism, Max Scheler (d. 1928), was a bitter opponent of commercial society. Not exactly hostile to riches, he nonetheless thought the animating principles of commercial civilization, the appetite for luxury and the adornments of vanity, destructive of true morals.¹ A remarkable feature of Thomas Reid’s thought is his poor opinion of riches, luxury and vanity. Remarkable, of course, because Hume and Smith spent so much time arguing that markets generate national greatness and human happiness and do so at the behest of vanity’s quest for riches.

Is it just a peculiarity that Reid and Scheler are united in their hostility to vanity or is there a genuine basis for this negative reaction in moral consensus or the objective order of value?²

The stakes are high. Civilisation, refinement in the arts and sciences, is a consequence of commerce, argues Hume. He writes:

> The more these refined arts advance, the more sociable men become … They flock into cities; love to receive and communicate knowledge; to show their wit or their breeding; their taste in conversation or living, in clothes or furniture. Curiosity allures the wise; vanity the foolish; and pleasure both. Particular clubs and societies are very where formed: Both sexes meet in an easy and sociable manner; and the tempers of men, as well as their behavior, refine apace. So that, beside the improvements which they receive from knowledge and the liberal arts, it is impossible but they must feel an increase of humanity, from

¹ For Scheler’s appreciation, and criticism, of the Scottish school, please see each Introduction I wrote for Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy* (London, 2007) and *On the Eternal in Man* (London, 2009). In the course of this essay, references to Scheler are from *The Nature of Sympathy*, cited in the text as NS.

² There is remarkable consensus across the ideological spectrum. See my discussion of Carl Schmitt on this point in my Introduction to Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism* (London, 2010) and on Peter Singer in *To Kill Another: Homicide and Natural Law* (London, 2010), chapter 8.
the very habit of conversing together, and contributing to each other’s pleasure and entertainment.  

It is the allure of fashion, opulence and vanity which incites our ‘relish for action’, quickness of mind, and our very humanity, insists Hume. Between them, Smith and Hume might be said to have established the Whig Consensus. Their argument is dramatic: Vanity is the basis of liberty. Turning the moral tradition on its head, they argued that the human appetite for adornment—for looking at the beautiful and being thought to be beautiful—is the engine of commerce. Given free rein, vanity would induce new refinements in the mechanical and liberal arts and carry nations out of poverty and towards civilisation. Rule of law is essential as these refinements are only made possible through the use of property. Property holding is basic to adornment—indeed, it maintains our idea of self—and gives owners both an interest in liberty and the means to resist abuses of power. This is the Whig argument that has settled into the Western mind and become a fixed sensibility of her peoples.

Who can doubt that Hume is basically correct? Whether one loves the music of Sir Charles Avison, Spode china, Gucci, Facebook, or the applications on your iPhone, the benefits of vanity and commerce are apparent.

Hume endorsed this argument heartily, Smith only with hesitation. Smith frequently speaks of the ‘delusive colours’ the imagination is apt to paint a life of luxury (TMS, 51) and his portrait of the ambitious young man fooled by riches, and betrayed, is chilling (TMS, 181). Commercial society is about toil, risk and anxiety, warns Smith; it is a matter of serving those you hate and deferring to those you contemn; there is little room for dignity in ambition, what Smith terms ‘heaven’s anger’ (TMS, 181). But Smith is convinced a price has to be paid so that the earth can redouble her fertility, as he says, and poverty be alleviated (TMS, 184). Smith’s sober assessment contrasts with Hume’s celebration and both contrast starkly with Reid’s reticence, if not

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clear suspicion (214).\(^7\) Aberdeen’s great riposte to skeptics everywhere looked towards Glasgow’s ‘delusive colours’ with skepticism.

Certainly, Reid does not share the utter dismay of later critics of commercial society. Though I want to examine the thematic connections between Reid and Scheler, Reid does not share the latter’s frank animosity towards commercial sensibility, an animosity found in so many other authors, ranging across the political spectrum from the likes of Carl Schmitt to Peter Singer. Reid draws a definite contrast between undeveloped, turgid, rough cultures and those which all should favour: Cultures exhibiting luxury, industry and politeness (115). Nonetheless, Reid’s departure from Smith and Hume is marked.

To demonstrate this, I (1) document Reid’s distance from the great Scottish Whigs; (2) show to what degree Reid was sensitive to the nuances of Hume’s and Smith’s reasoning in favour of markets; (3) explain how Reid’s arguments against riches and vanity emerge from his broad commitments in morals and natural law. Turning then to the thematic problem, (4) after briefly documenting Scheler’s basic objection to commercial society, my hope is that (5) a comparison between his moral theory and Reid’s will help clarify whether vanity is objectively morally disordered. I take points (1) to (5) to explore two broad points: How Reid can help us assess the moral standing of markets and whether Reid had a fractious relationship to the Scottish Enlightenment.

Reid’s distance from the great Scottish Whigs

Reid’s theism unsurprisingly moderates his sense of the authority of vanity. Our concern for the good regard of God, says Reid, ‘should in a great measure swallow up our desire of the approbation of our fellow men’. Our desire for honour, Reid believes ‘should lean chiefly toward that honour that is from God’ (119). To this end, Reid is interested in ‘the path of virtue’ (cf. 178; 184f) whereas it would not be too much to say that for Hume and Smith what matters most is the path of commerce.

In his discussion of entails, Reid acknowledges that riches can have a licit place in human life. Familiar from every Jane Austen film you have ever seen, an entail was a mechanism to secure inheritors far into the future. Reid and Smith both thought ill of entails (333, n. 46) but Reid’s criticism that entail is contrary to natural law (153) cuts heavily against Smith’s basic ideas of vanity.

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\(^7\) Throughout I rely on Reid’s *Practical Ethics*, a text dating to the 1760s when Reid was in Glasgow: K. Haakonsen (ed.), Thomas Reid, *Practical Ethics* (Princeton, 1990).
Reid especially objects to the irrationality of an agent bestowing control over a fortune to an heir not yet extant. This is an irrational act because the point of a fortune is ‘to make a good use of it’ (152). Reid argues that riches ought to result from virtue and industry (151–2) but knowledge of a secure fortune ‘often weakens those incitements to industry and virtue which the wisdom of providence has provided in the natural course of things’ (151). The ambition of the great to perpetuate their family’s prestige is ‘both a natural and laudable ambition’ but the Romans did this without recourse to entails. Without entails, the Romans had to foster in their children ‘those qualities which make men truly great’ (152) and in this way did they satisfy the point of having property, to enhance ‘public utility’ (153). Formalizing this point in his fascinating utopian speculations (281), Reid notes that the appetite for distinction is basic to human life, second only to the appetite for life itself (285). This appetite is not wrong in itself, and it is, Reid says, ‘by far a more generous and noble principle than the love of money or of private interest’ (282). However, excelling in a life of virtue is the only means to attain distinction adequate to human dignity: ‘A man may acquire riches by means honest and dishonest, but to acquire esteem his conduct must be accounted honest and laudable. Esteem is the natural reward of merit … ’ (282; cf. 205).

To Smith’s mind, merit earns a grudging esteem (TMS, 56) whereas beauty gains rapid recognition. Appetite is not stoked by necessity, thinks Smith, for even the meanest labourer easily fills his stomach. Appetite responds to beauty, and commerce is built on the effort to acquire vanity objects which allow the possessors to live out a fantasy, what Smith terms, ‘the system of happiness’ (TMS, 52). Fantasy does not replace nature but is its product. Our ideas about the ‘perfect and happy state’ of the rich and glamorous are generated by Smith’s minimalist natural law, what might be termed, the law of the imagination: The imagination is excited by the well-formed effects of an object; the imagination defers to this object on account of these effects even if they more remotely entail ill-formed effects. Because the remote effects of public utility and civic virtue seldom pierce the initial haze of beauty, says Smith, a palace will always strike the imagination as a more agreeable object than a prison (TMS, 35).

Smith’s observation plays havoc with Reid’s hopes. Far from tying esteem to merit, the imagination divides persons into those of ‘rank and distinction’ and those of ‘spirit and ambition’. The latter must exhibit ‘probity and prudence, generosity and frankness’ and a man of ambition must work patiently to ‘acquire superior knowledge of his profession, and superior industry in
the exercise of it’ \((TMS, 55)\). By contrast, the man of rank has few talents but much grace and ‘to figure at a ball is his great triumph’, as Smith rather marvelously says. If opportunity presents, the man of talent and ambition will strive to take advantage of events that ‘may draw upon himself the attention and admiration of mankind’ \((TMS, 55)\). And such is the basic ambition of human kind: ‘To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy … ’ \((TMS, 50)\). This the man of rank accomplishes by the elegance of his own deportment and the refinement of objects with which he adorns himself; in this case, merit matters not at all, merely beauty. As Smith puts it: ‘These are the arts by which he proposes to make mankind more easily submit to his authority, and to govern their inclinations according to his own pleasure: and in this he is seldom disappointed’ \((TMS, 54; emphasis added)\).

**To what degree Reid was sensitive to the nuances of Hume’s and Smith’s reasoning in favour of markets**

Reid’s *Practical Ethics* is a natural law text; it is rooted in theism, though not richly theological. Sometimes, the natural law defended is naturalism. Explaining the virtue of moderation, Reid argues that what counts as moderation of the appetites for food and drink is normed by ‘the health and vigour of the body’ \((187; 251)\). All the organs of the body have a proper function and our appetite for food and drink is no different \((186–7)\). The health and vigour of the body is best satisfied by ‘plain and simple fare’, says Reid, not appetite ‘provoked by the refinements of luxury’ \((187)\).

Reid is not insensitive to the play between nature and fantasy that so strikes Smith. About contracts which state a price, Reid argues that the measure of ‘the natural and reasonable price’ is ‘according to the customs and opinions of the country’ and this will reflect the incidence of luxury in the society \((165)\). The price of a commodity is fixed through the prism of ‘mens real and imaginary wants’ \((162)\) and the iterations of these wants in the society’s cult of luxury. Yet what Smith regards as the human penchant for fantasy, Reid sees as temptation. Reid grants there is a natural subordination to those possessing riches \((176–7)\) and while Smith sees this as a fruitful deception of the imagination, Reid regrets it profoundly \((285–7)\). From Reid’s utopian speculations, which are so critical of money, Reid can only hesitate about the moral standing of price. The terms ‘money’, ‘property’, and ‘riches’, can be used interchangeably and have rendered society nothing ‘else but a scramble
for money’ (286). The reason? The benevolent affections are ‘checked, opposed and born down’ (287) by temptations generated by money; the root of all evil, as testified to by Scripture, Reid reminds us (285). In effect, Reid concedes that commerce is about fantasy satisfaction, not public utility.

Is there any control of the possible iterations of luxury? Is there any coherence to the idea of a ‘natural measure’ of price when its scope includes man’s imaginary wants? Is there a clear point where Reid can say that the imaginary tips over into the delusional? We are surely far from Reid’s naturalism of bodily appetite. As it is, this naturalism seems to sit at odds with moral intuitionism which is typically explained as the idea that besides natural facts there are moral facts immediately perceivable by the mind and, in the language of the European school, these moral facts are phenomenological tones—discrete, self-contained, value essences e.g. the taste of a peach or malice.

How Reid’s arguments against riches and vanity emerge from his broad commitments in morals and natural law

Is Reid’s natural law reasoning tied to naturalism? I do not think so. Reid celebrates the Roman sensibility that forgiveness comes easily to the great souled, and he decries revenge cultures as unworthy of humankind, insisting that resentment is only licitly indulged for ‘injuries so atrocious in their own nature or so frequently repeated and persisted in’ (167–9). For ‘if we consider the state of a mind enflamed by resentment and meditating upon revenge: It is surely of all states the most undesirable, the most unlovely’ (168). This sense of the unlovely seems theoretically less a matter of an understanding of the human mind delivered through the psychological sciences than of a grasp of the value hierarchy (178; 205). We have, says Reid,

… an immediate perception of right and wrong, of moral rectitude and depravity, in moral agents, in like manner as we have a perception of

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9 There is a good variety of theoretical positions that all claim to be intuitionist but for the basics see the good summary in Jesse Prinz, The Emotional Construction of Morals (Oxford, 2009), 87–8.
10 See Scheler’s classic discussion in M. Scheler, Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values (Evanston, IL, 1973), 13–14; 68; 196–97.
black and white in visible objects by the eyes, of harmony and discord by a musical ear, and of other qualities in objects, by means of the several faculties of our nature, which are adapted so by the author of our nature as to give us not only the ideas of such qualities but an immediate perception of their existence in certain subjects (144).

Reid stresses that it is not the actions of an agent which we judge, properly speaking, but ‘a real quality’ in the agent (144). He seems to have in mind the idea of a value quality very comparable to the European phenomenological school.

Reid does speak of the idea of contract proving there is a moral faculty common to all mankind (156). Is this a matter of the moral cognitive faculties being attuned to values exhibited by objects or the faculties investing values in objects? It is the former. Reid writes:

> So universal a consent of mankind with regard to the main points of right and wrong of virtue and vice ought to satisfy the most skeptical not only of the reality of the distinction between the one and the other, but also that the Almighty has taken care of the constitution of our nature, to make this distinction so apparent and obvious that it requires no deep enquiry or laborious reasoning to discover it (179; emphasis added).

In Smith and Hume beauty is an allure, economic life itself stemming from the need to be beautiful. For Smith, as we saw, this is a matter of the imagination latching onto the well-formed and avoiding the ill-formed. It is not Smith’s suggestion, it seems to me, that the imagination invests objects with characteristics, rather is it that an aesthetic order is shot through nature, the effects of which strike the imagination, itself sensitive, and deferential, to this order. If one asks who is the spectator in Smith’s thought, the answer is the imagination, and at an even deeper level, aesthetic order (*TMS*, 183).

Even the mob can rightly reflect this order (*TMS*, 34–5). There is nothing in Reid approaching Smith’s passage on the contemptible man who submits to insults. Smith writes:

> Even the mob are enraged to see any man submit patiently to affronts and ill usage. They desire to see this insolence resented, and resented by

the person who suffers from it. They cry to him with fury, to defend, or to revenge himself. If his indignation rouses at last, they heartily applaud, and sympathize with it (TMS, 35).

Put differently, the human spectator is a basically sound reflection of the aesthetic-moral order. Reid’s utopian speculations show he does not share this confidence, and the point is crucial: A spectator is assumed in Reid’s account of natural price—price stems from social comparison. Reid is less a populist than Smith; he is more suspicious of crowds. For Reid, ethics is ‘for the most part easy’ (110) because our duty is relatively easy to grasp (111). However, agreement about what is actually fairly transparent is hard to come by on account of ‘biass and prejudice’ (111). Alert to what he calls the ‘deluded multitude’ (135), Reid speaks of a blindness:

> And as men are much disposed to take the rules of conduct from fashion rather than from the dictates of reason, so with regard to vices which are authorized by fashion, the judgments of men are apt to be blinded by the authority of the multitude, especially when interest or appetite leads the same way. (111)

Vanity without crowds is hardly possible. Hume has us crowding into cities precisely to mirror one another at the behest of vanity. Reid, however, is very classical about where ethics is situated: Ethics is a matter of interior order not exterior adjustments. Where Hume relishes the inversion of avarice into a foundational virtue, Reid resists such reversals. Reid runs together avarice, fraud and rapacity (174). For him, avarice is not a pragmatic social catalyst but a personal trial. There is a conflict between our spirit and flesh and our appetites grow and ripen faster than our reason matures (120; 131). The passions are ‘useful and necessary’, Reid insists (120), but he does not celebrate them as bearers of unique moral insight. Absent from Reid is any idea of an original sympathetic communication, out of which might naturally arise individual articulations of social life. The communication fostered by commerce as an extension of our sympathetic interest in one another’s lives, must be achieved radically, so to say, for Reid. The state takes its origin from the need for individuals to have protection from one another (174; 191). Security is the basis of community whilst for Hume and Smith sympathy is the basis of solidarity. Reid’s is more a solidarity of duty and virtue attained than an easily come by fellow-feeling. His thinking has about it a Platonic edge: For him,
the resources of nature to attain virtue are few; and few because opposed by temptation, money. If Reid views social comparison as a temptation and not fruitful fantasy, as does Smith, it is because Reid sees bifurcation where Smith claims continuity. Smith has about him something of a moral minimalist to Reidian eyes because sympathy is, for Smith, a relatively uncomplicated phenomenon: Human appetite might be beholden to fantasy but seldom blighted by out and out perversity; perversity, we might say, can register in Smith as no more than statistical noise.12

**Scheler’s basic objection to commercial society**

Vanity is hardly possible without inequality and property. It is striking that inequality is not a dominant theme in Reid (177; 286), whereas it is the touchstone of progressive thinking today. Reid speculates on the elimination of property because he sees it as a source of temptation, all too easily satisfied by crime (285). Temptation matters to Reid less because it fosters social inequality and more because it destroys the integrity of the person. Scheler echoes Reid’s worry.

Vanity might bring people together, as Hume thinks, but, argues Scheler, vanity trips the abandonment of the self. Ever sensitive to how he is received by others, the vain man lives out a social self leaving his personal, individual self untended. The ‘spiritual vampire’, as Scheler terms him, is the human type mired in vanity. Thomas Aquinas identified a leading characteristic of vanity as exhilaration in novelty. The spiritual vampire, writes Scheler, ‘does not fasten on a single individual, but always on one after another, so as to live a life of his own in their experiences, and fill the void within’ (NS, 43).13 There is a reversal of value here, one that defines the modern world, according to Scheler. The high value of personal discrimination is forsaken for lower generic values of assimilation (NS, 39–44). Many today intuit what Scheler seeks to make explicit: there is an unacceptable twisting of values inside of much of the business world. Whether in film and television or local shops

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12 For my discussion of the same point in Hume, see ‘New Spartans: Jankélévitch, Scheler and Tolkien on Vanity’ in A. Udoff (ed.), Jankélévitch and the Question of Forgiveness (Lexington Press, forthcoming).

13 Examples abound: Whether one thinks of the hook up culture on campus, serial divorce, the political junkie, the fashion victim, the cult of the celebrity, academics reading six books at once, or the culture of reactivity to cell phones and texting. A great film portrayal is Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*. 
and bars a common complaint about business is the way in which persons are disregarded as mechanistic management practices squeeze out profits wherever and however they are to be had. That which is highest, persons, and that which is finest, the life of the mind, arts and hobbies, play second fiddle to what is least inspiring, routinization.

Reid’s moral theory and Scheler compared: Broad implications

The diminishment of the person figures in Reid. For Reid, departure from natural law, and the life of virtue, is a dissolution of self, albeit expressed in a more traditional, less personalist, tone than in Scheler. For Scheler, vanity eliminates the person; for Reid, it destabilizes, prompting the passions to overrule reason’s proper perception of moral properties, and even inciting to crime. Though in a highly moderated form, Reid does agree with Scheler about the negative tone of commercial culture. He is a critic of the Scottish Enlightenment—at least with respect to what I think is its primary gesture—and whilst not rejecting commerce, Reid does highlight its moral precariousness. About this, our intuitionists are clear.

In shattering self-command, vanity leads to the inversion of the value hierarchy. It has a place in a fallen world, thinks Reid, but he is more severe than even Aquinas on this point. Aquinas thinks that vanity can at least act as a goad to others and thereby help build a better world. Reid does not dismiss this idea but his interesting application to the idea of utopia suggests a darker assessment of vanity, and a more radical solution. Comparison to others distorts our sense of moral valuation and perhaps Reid’s theory even suggests that aesthetics, if given the prominence Smith proposes, is itself distorting. Fantasy easily collapses into temptation, fashion fostering delusion, and whilst Smith accepts this as a sort of felix culpa, Reid thinks of it as simply negative. In pulling us away from the natural, fantasy obscures the moral order as such.

The antidote to vanity is utopianism, a speculation about the elimination of property. Utopianism commits Reid, minimally, to a criticism of spontaneous order in favour of significant state formation; he is an advocate of Christian progressivism correcting a fallen world. Scripture speaks of the ‘principalities of this world’, and Reid agrees: Temptation and moral corruption are genuine

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moral phenomena; for the Whigs, they are epiphenomena of basically sound aesthetic-sympathetic foundations.

How successful are these arguments? Is intuitionism adequate to the demonstration that vanity is objectively moral disordered? Much hinges on whether fantasy collapses into temptation. Scheler’s identification of the spiritual vampire is undeniably correct but how pervasive is the condition? The poor opinion of riches he shares with Reid accords with a permanent unease almost everyone has about business. As Alain de Botton points out, there is something that rings false about the eighteenth century claim that work and happiness go together. Hume’s celebratory tone rings less true than Smith’s cautions but how does Reid fair? Our unease about the modern conception of work and industry is offset, it seems, by the human regard for fantasy and our fascination with the beautiful. How thoroughly one thinks business inverts the moral hierarchy depends ultimately, I think, on whether the moral order can adequately be isolated from the aesthetic. Elsewhere, I have argued that a modern intuitionist heavily influenced by Reid, Aurel Kolnai (d. 1973), may well have found a way to meet both the concerns of Scheler and Reid, as well as those of Hume and Smith. Kolnai attempts a modern rehabilitation of the idea of nobility: With the patience of a classical phenomenologist, he unearths the value tones of nobility and shows the connection the concept has to that of refinement. Refinement is a central motif in Hume’s defence of commerce and property. It is a concept little emphasized by Reid—but perhaps implicit in a number of his discussions and not least his magnificent account of courtship—and it may well hold the clue to how best to think of the moral character of markets.

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Dugald Stewart on Innate Ideas and the Origin of Knowledge

Emanuele Levi Mortera

Nativism and the Science of Mind

The role played by Dugald Stewart in the construction of a ‘standard’ image of the Scottish Enlightenment has been stressed more than once. It has been justly remarked that, particularly with his Biographical Memoirs of Adam Smith, William Robertson and Thomas Reid, and still more with his historical Dissertation, Stewart strategically aimed at an intellectual reconstruction or ‘invention’ of the whole Scottish Enlightenment in order to put forward ‘a patriotic defense of the Scottish philosophical tradition’; as far as he ‘defined Scottish identity in terms of the institutions and traditions he surveyed’, both the Dissertation and the Biographical Memoirs ‘served to underwrite his conception of Scotland, and the native school of philosophy he delineated consequently played a conspicuous part in his understanding of not only what Scotland was, but also what it ought to become’.1 According to this reconstruction, Hutcheson and Hume were the first who gave a fundamental contribution to the creation of a science of man, but it was only with the philosophy of common sense that the study of the human mind came to be founded on steadily metaphysical basis and correct methodological criteria.

It is within this framework that Stewart’s reconsideration of the long

disputed issue of innate ideas might also be considered, so that his arguments can be seen as an historiographic—and apologetic—proposal subservient to the institutional exigency of presenting the Scottish common sense philosophy as the last and most balanced result of the whole history of Scottish philosophy. The consequence would be to reveal the science of mind as the most genuine product of the Baconian-Newtonian experimental tradition, founded no longer on pure metaphysical principles but on the introspective observation of psychological phenomena. As often happens in Stewart’s writings, he aims at smoothing the extremes and balancing the opposite positions which he takes into consideration, trying at the same time to furnish an original solution to the problem which he is in the process of analysing. Thus, according to Stewart, the dispute on innate ideas would become, granted an agreement on words, a mere word-play, while those who were seemingly on different positions would have actually maintained the same argument. Following Stewart’s own reconstruction of this dispute, but leaving till the end of this paper his own position on nativism in general and the origin of knowledge, I shall discuss some relevant points concerning these issues, trying to understand if, and to what extent, common sense philosophers are committed to a theory of innate ideas.2

Stewart on Descartes’ Nativism

In the first part of his Dissertation, writing about Descartes’ works, Stewart remarks that he was ‘the father of genuine metaphysics’, and that to him must be ascribed the ‘glory of having pointed out to his successors the true method of studying the theory of mind.’ Granted that, for Stewart, the ‘genuine metaphysics’ corresponds to the philosophy of the human mind, and that the ‘true method’ means the introspection on, and the analysis of mental phenomena, Stewart adds that

on the whole, [Descartes] has added very little to our knowledge of human nature. […] his errors in this science were on a scale of

2 The issues presented in this paper are strictly connected to those I proposed in an article on the relation between Stewart’s philosophy and Kantian Criticism entitled ‘Stewart, Kant and the Reworking of Common Sense’, History of European Ideas, 38 (1), 2012, 122-42, a special issue devoted to Dugald Stewart which may help to better understand the whole of Stewart’s ‘nationalistic’ philosophical strategy.
proportionate magnitude. Of these the most prominent […] were his obstinate rejection of all speculations about final causes; his hypothesis concerning the lower animals, which he considered as mere machines; his doctrine of innate ideas, as understood and expounded by himself; (in Descartes’ reasoning on this question, there is no inconsiderable portion of most important truth debased by a large and manifest alloy of error), his noted paradox of placing the essence of mind in thinking, and of matter in extension; and his new modification of the ideal theory of perception, adopted afterwards, with some very slight changes, by Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume.3

It may be asked why Stewart does not reject outright the Cartesian theory of innate ideas, considering his general opinion about Descartes’ heritage. The fact is that Stewart was well aware of the ambiguities which characterise Descartes’ theory of innate ideas, a seemingly never-made choice between a dispositional nativism—according to which ideas are produced by certain dispositions of the mind adequately raised up by a stimulus—and an actual or occurrent nativism, according to which ideas are actually but implicitly present in the mind, waiting to be rendered manifest at a certain time. Let us consider Descartes’ three kinds of ideas as presented in the third Meditation—‘adventitious’, ‘made up’, and ‘innate’. The first two are, respectively, ideas of sensation and imagination, formed according to some corporeal motions and usually conveying an obscure and confused knowledge. In a strict sense they are not innate, even though they could be considered to be so because they have no resemblance with the corporeal motions which have produced or occasioned them. Strictly speaking, every idea should be considered as innate because none of them has any resemblance with the qualities of the object it represents. It is in this hard sense that Descartes put the term in his Comments on a Certain Broadsheet, a short work written in 1647 in reply to his correspondent and follower Regius:

Nothing reaches our mind from external objects through the sense organs except certain corporeal motions…But neither the motions themselves nor the figures arising from them are conceived by us exactly as they occur in the sense organs, as I have explained at length in my Optics. Hence it follows that the very ideas of the motions themselves and of the figures are innate in us. The ideas of pain, colours, sounds

and the like must be all the more innate if, on the occasions of certain corporeal motions, our mind is to be capable of representing them to itself, for there is no similarity between these ideas and the corporeal motions.\(^4\)

It is therefore the faculty of thinking itself which is innate rather than those foreign entities categorised as ideas. With regard to the ‘innate’ ideas properly so called, that is, as distinguished from the ‘adventitious’ and ‘made up’ ideas, Descartes seems to maintain a wavering position. On the one hand, he speaks sometimes either of real and objective entities located in the mind (idea \textit{objective}), or of actual but implicit thoughts (idea \textit{formaliter}); on the other, he sometimes speaks of some faculty or disposition according to which ideas could be framed. In any case, he speaks of purely intellectual, clear and distinct ideas—notably the \textit{res cogitans}, the idea of God, the ideas of mathematical entities, and the \textit{res extensa}—that cannot be derived from sense or imagination.

When Descartes holds an ‘occurrent’ or ‘actual’ nativism, he borders on a kind of Platonism, as shown, for example, in the \textit{Fifth Meditation}:

\begin{quote}

on first discovering them [viz. the ideas of mathematics] it seems that I am not so much learning something new, as remembering what I knew before; or it seems like noticing for the first time things which were long present within me although I had never turned my mental gaze on them before.\(^5\)
\end{quote}

The triangle considered from a geometrical point of view is an object of pure intellect. It is contained potentially in the triangle drawn on the paper, as a statue is contained potentially in a block of marble, allowing us to recognise in the figure drawn on the paper just a triangle with its properties. These properties do not in fact exist in nature and are completely unchangeable, because both of their logical necessity and their being non-contradictory. This view is further remarked by Descartes in a letter to the Hyperaspistes, written in August 1641 where, after telling his correspondent that an infant’s mind is mainly occupied in perceiving sensations, he says:

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotemark[5] Ibid., II, 44
\end{footnotes}
Nonetheless, it has in itself the ideas of God, itself, and all such truths as are called self-evident, in the same way as adult humans have when they are not attending to them; it does not acquire these ideas later on, as it grows older. I have no doubt that if it were taken out of the prison of the body it would find them within itself.6

The ‘dispositional’ position is on the contrary well displayed in the third Replies where, answering to Hobbes, Descartes holds that

Lastly, when we say that an idea is innate in us, we do not mean that it is always there before us. This would mean that no idea was innate. We simply mean that we have within ourselves the faculty of summoning up the idea.7

And, most clearly in the Comments on Certain Broadsheet, ideas are innate

in the same sense in which we say that generosity is ‘innate’ in certain families, or that certain diseases such as gout or stone are innate in others: it is not so much that the babies of such families suffer from these diseases in their mother’s womb, but simply that they are born with a certain ‘faculty’ or tendency to contract them.8

If it is true that what is innate is a mere potentiality, or the unrealised capacity to form or acquire knowledge, the problem is how and in what manner these dispositions are activated. An answer, which would equally apply to innate-intellectual ideas, might be ‘the senses’, although this would create some tension with the ontological status of innate ideas themselves and the very nature of the res cogitans. Nonetheless, we might consider the senses not as the proximate cause of the activation, but rather the ‘occasions’ which give motion to some innate ‘schemes’; these schemes interpret, translate or codify in a mental language what the occasions furnish, eventually producing or making manifest the ideas.9

6 Ibid., III, 190.
7 Ibid., II, 132.
8 Ibid., I, 303–4.
9 The major or minor role attributed to the senses as a direct cause in the process of knowledge depends on the major or minor weight attributed to a Dualist view. For a ‘causalist’—and not ‘occasionalist’—reading of the perceptive process in Descartes see T.D. Schmaltz, ‘Sensation, Occasionalism and Descartes’, in P.D. Cummins and
Stewart is undoubtedly more sympathetic to Descartes’ dispositional version of nativism rather than with the occurrent version of it, although he seems to think that, on the whole, Descartes was an occurrent nativist. As we shall see, Stewart accepts a dispositional version of nativism where the sensible ‘occasions’ play a fundamental role in the activation of mental faculties. In this sense, his main aim seems to be in conformity with a conception of the origin and nature of knowledge that requires a less metaphysical pattern of mind, a pattern respectful of more updated methodological criteria and oriented towards establishing the psychological laws which govern its phenomena.

Cudworth’s intermediation

Stewart finds a prompting example of the role of sensible occasions in awakening the dormant faculties and powers of the mind in Ralph Cudworth who, more than other English Platonists, seems to afford a good alternative to the two philosophical extremes represented, according to Stewart, by the ‘Cartesians’ and by the ‘Gassendists’. The first are those who hold substantially an actual or occurrent version of nativism. Among them, the most remarkable names are Descartes and Leibniz, in whose works the expression ‘innate ideas’ seems to imply, not only that ideas have an existence distinct from the faculty of thinking but that some ideas at last, form part of the original furniture of the mind; presenting to it treasures of knowledge, which it has only to examine by abstracted meditation, in order to arrive at the most sublime truth. […] The supposition […] of latent ideas in the mind, previous to the exercise of the senses, (a supposition bordering nearly to the old Platonic scheme of the soul’s reminiscence), cannot be guarded against with too great caution.10

The second are those who manifestly maintain, or are in the shadow of, the ‘scheme of materialism’: among them Stewart includes not only Hobbes

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and the Hobbesian heritage, but also, during the Eighteenth Century, some of the French Philosophes—especially Diderot and Helvétius—and the French Idéologues—notably Destutt de Tracy—as well as the Associationistic-Materialistic tradition chiefly represented by David Hartley, Joseph Priestley and Erasmus Darwin, and the Empiricist one, which included some interesting and, at that time, influential names such as the philologer John Horne-Tooke and the physician and chemist Thomas Beddoes.¹¹

In his works, Cudworth underlined with great emphasis the spontaneous activity of the mind and its work on the materials furnished by the senses in order to produce knowledge. In his Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality he writes that, although all the created intellects

have not the actual ideas of all things, much less are the images or sculpture of all the several species of existent things fixed and engraven in a dead manner upon them; yet they have them all virtually and potentially comprehended in that one cognescitive power (vis cognitrix) of the soul, which is a potential omniformity whereby it is enabled as occasion serves and outward objects invite, gradually and successively to unfold and display itself in a vital manner, by framing intelligible ideas or conceptions within itself or whatsoever hath any entity or cogitability.¹²

Once the passive part of the soul has received the sensible images of the external objects from without, these become the occasions that awaken the mind, which ‘by ruminating and revolving within itself’ produces ‘that strange parturiency that is often observed in [it], when it is solicitously set upon the investigation of some truth’.¹³ Cudworth’s language is indeed extremely perspicuous when he speaks about the activity of the mind; thus, knowledge is ‘an inward and active energy of the mind itself, and the display of its own innate vigour from within, whereby it doth conquer, master, and command its objects, and so begets a clear, serene, victorious, and satisfactory sense within itself’; and, similarly, the mind ‘desires to master and conquer the [external things] by its own active strength and power and to comprehend them by some ideas of its own, which are not foreign, but native, domestic, and intrinsical to it’.¹⁴

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¹³ Ibid., 78–9.
¹⁴ Ibid., 73, 102.
Platonism, of course, plays a central role in Cudworth’s thought, in so far as ideas, as genuine products of the understanding, give universality to sense experience. Like Descartes, Cudworth maintains that, in some fashion, pure intellectual knowledge exists before experience comes to inform us with its material. But, unlike Descartes, Cudworth considers universal ideas only as ectypical—that is, copies—of the true archetypal ideas existing in the eternal intellect of God. This hard Platonic framework is indeed absent in Descartes, whose ‘ideal system’ is entirely psychological and without any reference to abstract or logical entities, an aspect which is shared by and large also by the common-sense philosophers. Nonetheless, Stewart is more sympathetic to Cudworth than to Descartes, or to other Cambridge Platonists, or even to Kant. Although Stewart deems Cudworth’s most famous concept of ‘plastic nature’ or ‘plastic power’ as a kind of mystical relic, he nevertheless finds in him a rich store of enlightened and choice erudition, penetrated throughout with a peculiar vein of sobered and subdued Platonism, from whence some German systems, which have attracted no small notice in our own times, will be found, when stripped of their deep neological disguise, to have borrowed their most valuable materials.\(^{15}\)

However, apart from his mystical aspects, Cudworth afforded a sharing model of the mind-body relation which, granted the central role played by physiological dynamics, yet acknowledged the distinction between the two spheres.

**Locke’s challenge**

Ralph Cudworth represents a rather common tendency within the seventeenth-century English intellectual framework, a historical moment where philosophical reflection was often subservient to the theological and

\(^{15}\) D. Stewart, *Dissertation*, pt 1, in *Collected Works*, I, 86. Kant is explicitly referred to as an author who actually repeated in a more obscure way Cudworth’s main ideas. Stewart was indeed more fascinated by Kant’s philosophy than at first glance might appear. See for example J. Friday, ‘Dugald Stewart on Reid, Kant and the Refutation of Idealism’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 13 (2005), 263–6. For Stewart’s different approach to Kant in his *Philosophical Essays* and in his *Dissertation* see E. Levi Mortera, ‘Stewart, Kant and the Reworking of Common Sense’. 
political demands. Edward Herbert of Cherbury, Benjamin Whichcote, Joseph Raphson, Nathaniel Culverwell, John Smith, Henry More, Cudworth and Anglican Churchmen like Edward Stillingfleet, seem to share a dispositional nativism articulated in a more or less persuasive way. Thus, while Lord Herbert’s rather ingenuous arguments in favour of some innate practical principles will become an easy target for Locke’s criticism, Henry More affords a more refined version of nativism. In saying that the mind is endowed with innate ideas, he claims that

I doe not mean that there is a certaine number of Ideas flaring and shining to the Animadversive faculty, like so many Torches or Starres in the Firmament to our outward Sight, or that there are any figures that take their distinct places, & are legibly writ there like the Red letters or Astronomical Characters in an Almanack; but I understand thereby an active sagacity in the Soul, or quick recollection as it were, whereby some small businesse being hinted unto her, she runs out presently into a more clear and larger conception.16

Stillingfleet, as far as concerns the idea of God, similarly remarks that ‘not that there is any such connate Idea in the Soul, in the sense which connate Idea’s are commonly understood; but … there is a faculty in the Soul, whereby upon the free use of reason, it can form within its self a settled notion of such a Being’.17 When Locke puts forward his refutation of innate ideas in the first book of his Essay, his strategy is thus quite clear. He takes into consideration the occurrent nativism which is easier to refute and not the more sophisticated dispositional version. Indeed, Locke considers this last as a contradiction: in his view, the notion of something known only potentially is inconceivable because everything which is known must be perceivable or, what amount to the same thing, must be present to consciousness. According to Locke, having ideas means to perceive, that is to say being conscious of something which is


produced either by sensation or by reflection.\textsuperscript{18} This reduction of knowledge to consciousness as its exclusive source is something that Stewart cannot accept, because it represents a limitation in the ability of the mind to generate new and original notions. Actually, according to Stewart’s interpretation of Locke, sensation and reflection are not [in Locke] merely affirmed to furnish the occasions which suggest to the understanding the various simple or elementary modification of thought, to which [Locke] gives the name of Simple Ideas; but to furnish the mind directly and immediately with these ideas in the obvious and literal sense of expression.\textsuperscript{19}

Thus, simple ideas would be either the immediate object of consciousness produced by the faculty of reflection or a copy of some quality perceived by our external sense. It appears farther, that Locke conceived these copies, or images, to be the immediate objects of thought, all our information about the material world being obtained by their intervention.\textsuperscript{20}

As we shall see, Stewart exploits what in his eyes appears to be an intrinsic ambiguity in Locke’s faculty of Reflection; if it is, in fact, the source of the ideas of our mental operations, these ideas may seem to be generated by reflecting—in an optical meaning—what sensation has previously furnished.\textsuperscript{21} Thus, in reinterpreting Locke’s faculty of Reflection through his own reading of Cudworth, Stewart makes it a faculty from which new sets of original

\textsuperscript{18} ‘It seem[s] to me near a contradiction, to say, that there are truths imprinted on the soul, which it perceives or understands not: Imprinting, if it signify anything, being nothing else, but the making certain truths to be perceived. For to imprint anything on the mind, without the mind’s perceiving it, seems to me hardly intelligible’. P. H. Nidditch (ed.), John Locke, \textit{An Essay concerning Human Understanding} (Oxford, 1975), I, ii, 5, 49–50.


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{21} ‘In time, the mind come to reflect on its own operations, about the ideas got by sensation, and thereby stores itself with a new set of ideas, which I call ideas of reflection. These are the impressions that are made on our senses by outward objects, that are extrinsical to the mind; and its own operations, proceeding from powers intrinsical and proper to itself, which when reflected on by itself, become also objects of its contemplation, are, as I have said, the original of all knowledge’. John Locke, \textit{An Essay concerning Human Understanding}, II, i, 24, 117–18.
ideas may be originated according to some sensible ‘occasions’. Indeed, as we shall see, he will try to show that this is the sole way of intending the role of Reflection, and that Locke himself was committed to a kind of dispositional nativism rather than—as alleged by the French philosophes—to a form of sensationalism ready to be transformed in the ‘scheme’ of materialism.

Reid’s common-sense nativism

Let us now turn to Thomas Reid. Having received the manuscript of Reid’s *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, David Hume expresses in a letter to Hugh Blair his criticism of it, claiming that, ‘If I comprehend the Author’s Doctrine, which, I own, I can hitherto do but imperfectly, it leads us back to innate ideas’. Various passages in Reid’s *Inquiry* may have induced Hume to hold this opinion. In general, Reid maintains, more than Descartes, that there is no resemblance between the ‘internal’ and the ‘external’—between, say, a sensation and the object which caused it, or between the sensation and the conception or notion of the object which it has suggested to the mind. Thus, Reid seems to afford the idea that those notions are innate. Moreover, Reid claims that

> The division of our notions into ideas of sensation, and ideas of reflection, is contrary to all rules of Logic; because the second member of the division includes the first. For, can we form clear and just notions of our sensations any other way than by reflection? Surely we cannot. Sensation is an operation of the mind of which we are conscious; and we get the notion of sensation by reflecting upon that which we are conscious of.

This reduction of sensation to reflection—or, better, to consciousness—might be a way to admit, indirectly, that the ideas/notions have a nature independent from what has occasioned them and thus that they are in some way innate. Elsewhere, Reid maintains that we have a direct and immediate knowledge of the qualities of bodies from our senses, a remark that could be contrasted with

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his apparent nativist position. The truth is, as Lorne Falkenstein has noted, that we must not confound what is innate with what is intuitively known. Reid is quiet clear on this point when he says that ‘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’. Thus, what is innate are not ideas or notions, rather the faculties and powers of the mind which are the means by which notions are originated. Both original and acquired perceptions, for example, require a previous sensible stimulus which allows the faculties to suggest those qualities. Faculties are dynamic innate powers or structures of the mind; they are dispositions which adequately react only after a stimulus, and their task is to translate and codify in mental signs what comes from the external world. Knowledge is the natural answer of human nature/human mind to the environment and the first task of the philosopher is to establish the laws which regulate the mental phenomena.

Thus Hume might be correct in his criticism if we look at it from his point of view. He starts from his basic copy principle, according to which, if we have no impression, no correspondent idea is given. If, for example, we do not have an impression of power, we lack the idea of power. But this does not mean that we do not have a belief in something that is efficient. Philosophy may lead to scepticism, but nature remains nevertheless something irresistible which forces us to believe in those things that philosophy itself shows us to be irrational. Thus Hume’s question becomes: how do we come to believe in things of which we have no impression and thus no idea? The Treatise and the Inquiry are the answers to this question. On the contrary, according to Reid, we have an idea or notion of power independently of some correspondent impression. Hume’s copy principle is for Reid a way which could reintroduce a kind of resemblance between what is ‘internal’ and what is ‘external’; independently of their origin, beliefs are for Reid the manifest signs of the work of nature in its intercourse with human body and human

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26 Derek Brooks and Knud Haakonsen (eds), Thomas Reid, Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man (Pennsylvania, 2002; 1785), VI, vii, 520.
According to Reid, what is original is the response of the internal structure of the faculties by which we come to obtain the conception of the primary qualities of bodies, their position and their visible figure. The first notions of objects derive from an indistinct complex which must be decomposed by an analytical process:

It is acknowledged on all hands that the first notions we have of sensible objects are got by the external senses only, and probably before judgment is brought forth; but these first notions are neither simple, nor are they accurate and distinct: They are gross and indistinct, and like the chaos, a rudis indigestaque moles. Before we can have any distinct notion of this mass, it must be analysed; the Heterogeneous parts must be separated in our conceptions, and the simple elements, which before lay hid in the common mass, must first be distinguished, and then put together into one whole.²⁸

This differentiates Reid from Kant, according to whom the product of Transcendental Apperception is furnished, synthetically, by the application of some a-priori logical forms to the sensible intuitions or, in other terms, the ‘blind’ sensible intuitions are re-composed under a categorial framework of spatial-temporal forms and ‘empty’ concepts. For Reid, neither notions, conception, nor the principles in general are innate in the classical or occurrent meaning of the term, or a priori. Principles, in particular, are the necessary and natural response of the constitution of human nature to the stimulus of the environment, the product of natural dispositions which, in a way similar to the

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²⁷ Thomas Brown was right to remark how Reid and Hume were in accord, at least in respect of the problem of external world and the ultimate role of nature: ‘The creed of which on this point is composed of two propositions, and of the same two propositions, the first of which is, that the existence of a system of things, such as we understand when we speak of an external world, cannot be proved by argument; and the second, that the belief of it is of a force which is paramount to that of argument and absolutely irresistible. The difference, and the only difference is that, in asserting the same two propositions, the sceptic pronounces the first in a loud tone of voice, and the second in a whisper—while his supposed antagonist passes rapidly over the first, and dwells on the second with a tone of confidence’; T. Dixon (ed.), Thomas Brown, Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind, in Life and Collected Works of Thomas Brown, 8 vols. (Bristol, 2003), vol. VI, 177.

geometric axioms, constitute the necessary conditions both for philosophical and scientific inquiry and for guiding men in their practical life.29

Stewart and the origin of knowledge

Stewart follows the way opened by Reid in aiming at a theoretical and practical construction of a correct science of mind, considered as a coherent alternative to the ‘way of ideas’. Often departing from Reid’s teaching, Stewart reformulates the faculty psychology set by his master, emphasising its cognitive and mental character and introducing in his inquiry a bent to conjectural reasoning which marks his updated attitude to methodological issues. In any case, he maintains that the preliminary analysis of mental faculties and powers according to correct inductive criteria represents ‘the first chapter of a natural history of the human mind’.30 This goal is of first importance for the construction of a ‘rational logic’ useful to the understanding and the development of Man in general, and respectful of that ‘culture of the mind’ which was among the most relevant aspects of Reid’s heritage. The rational logic has to be specifically understood as the study of the whole intellectual processes by which we come to know something, or, in other words, the study of the cognitive processes which operate in reasoning, discovery and demonstration. It could be considered as a kind of intellectual map through which we become acquainted with the various forms of discursive reason, of the media of proof which are used, consciously or unconsciously, to explicate our own knowledge and the ways in which we come to obtain it.

Thus Stewart merges the teaching of Reid, Locke and Cudworth within the framework of the Newtonian methodological heritage; he tries to find a balance between the Lockean sources of knowledge, sensation and reflection, making the first the necessary occasion which ‘awaken[s] the mind to a consciousness of its own existence, [giving] rise to the exercise of its various faculties’.31 Without the organ of sense, the mind would be destitute

31 Stewart, Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, vol. 1 (1792), in Collected Works,
of knowledge, not because it might not produce original notions whose nature has no resemblance to the objects and to the relative sensations, but rather because it would lack the occasion to exert its powers. As we have seen, Stewart does not agree with Locke’s reduction of knowledge to the sole evidence of consciousness; to be conscious of something means for Locke to perceive something, and this perception is directly—and, it might be said, passively—given from ideas of sensation and ideas of reflection. Accordingly, our own existence, for example, would be an immediate and evident product of consciousness. Stewart claims, instead, that the awareness of our own existence is a consequence of a different process which starts with external senses and goes on with the mind’s activity. A sensation is followed by an impression on the organ of sense and, at this moment,

we learn two facts at once: the existence of the sensation and our own existence as sentient beings […] or the present existence of that being which I denote by the words I and myself. Of these facts, however, it is the former alone of which we can properly be said to be conscious […] The latter is made known to us by a suggestion of the understanding consequent on the sensation, but so intimately connected with it, that it is not surprising that our belief of both should be generally referred to the same origin.32

Even the ‘celebrated entymeme’ of Descartes’ *Cogito ergo sum* might be read in the light of this distinction between what occasions and what is occasioned, thus weakening its strong metaphysical import:

To me it seems more probable, that [Descartes] meant chiefly to direct the attention of his readers to a circumstance which must be allowed to be not unworthy of notice in the history of the human mind; the impossibility of our ever having learned the fact of our own existence, without some sensation being excited in the mind, to awaken the faculty of thinking.33

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33 Ibid., 59. A slight correction of this ‘benevolence’ occurs immediately in a footnote by Stewart himself: ‘After looking again into the *Meditation* of Descartes, I am doubtful if I have not carried my apology for him a little farther than his own words will justify. I am still of opinion, however, that it was the remark which I have ascribed to him, that first led him into this train of thought.’ Ibid., footnote.
Stewart does not speak of a receptacle of inborn ideas which are only waiting to be unveiled. He argued against every form of occurrent nativism or radical Platonism, praising Locke for having furnished ‘an antidote against those prejudices which had been favoured by the hypothesis of innate ideas’. He speaks rather of a twofold ‘occasionality’: that of the senses towards the faculties and that of the faculties towards the simple notions. This doctrine was chiefly designed to avoid the partial interpretation which the French philosophes would have made of the Lockean philosophy, reducing his theory of knowledge to a mere ‘transformed sensation’. Stewart’s corrections of Locke’s doctrine have thus to be interpreted not as a direct attack on the English philosopher. Rather, Locke would represent the just intermediation between those who, with Descartes, hold ‘that the mind is furnished with certain innate ideas’, and those who hold that ideas ‘may be all traced from sensation alone’. Stewart’s doctrine of a twofold ‘occasionality’ may be extended also to other simple notions which the mind would produce. Thus, even though a judgment like ‘everything begins to exist must have a cause’ derives neither from reason nor from experience, but is of an intuitive nature, it must be taken into consideration that the necessity of notions like cause, space, time is added only after experience has furnished us the sensible occasion for them. If, on the one hand, this doctrine may recall Kant’s claim that all our knowledge commences with experience but it does not arise all from experience, on the other, it seems to lean to a kind of occasionalism. While Stewart always maintained an ambivalent position towards Kant’s Critical philosophy, it would, however, be difficult to ascribe to him a Malebranchian bent, at least as far as concern mental phenomena. Stewart shows some reservation in relation to Malebranche because of his ‘strong disposition to blend his theology and his metaphysics together; availing himself of the one as an auxiliary to the other’. Even agreeing with Malebranche’s doctrine according to which the laws of nature cannot be discovered by an a priori reasoning but only by experience and observation, Stewart criticises Malebranche’s rash conclusion that ‘the Deity is himself the efficient and the immediate cause of every effect

35 Ibid.
36 I have explored elsewhere Stewart’s reasons in first accepting and then rejecting Kant’s philosophy, showing how his ambivalence towards Transcendentalism is in part to be ascribed to the same strategy which headed the composition of the three biographical accounts and of the *Dissertation*. See E. Levi Mortera, ‘Stewart, Kant and the Reworking of Common Sense’, esp. pts. 3–4.
Dugald Stewart on Innate Ideas and the Origin of Knowledge

in the universe’. Stewart argues that this conclusion would derive from an unjustified exclusion of secondary causes and of the possibility that ‘although no necessary connexions among physical events can be traced by our faculties, it does not therefore follow that such connexions are impossible’. Thus, granted the reasonableness of a direct intervention of the Deity, it must be remain only probable if considered from a methodological point of view, because it lacks of a sufficient inductive evidence.

Stewart thus clearly offers a reinterpretation of the whole philosophical tradition in relation to the problem of innate ideas. In distinguishing two great philosophical movements, that of the ‘Gassendists’ and that of the ‘Cartesians,’ he puts Locke in this last, remarking that

I do not think [...] that Locke would have hesitated for a moment to admit, with Cudworth and Price, that the Understanding is itself a source of new ideas. That it is by Reflection (which, according to his own definition, means merely the exercise of the Understanding on the internal phenomena) that we get our ideas of memory, imagination, reasoning, and of all other intellectual powers, Mr. Locke has again and again told us. [...] According to [the distinction between Gassendists and Cartesians], Locke, notwithstanding some occasional slips of his pen, belongs indubitably to the class of Cartesians.

Stewart’s intention seems therefore to be to create a continuity as far the problem of nativism is concerned, remoulding it in order to justify the transformation operated by the Scottish philosophy in respect to the whole science of mind. He thus resorts to a less naïve Cartesianism than that presented by Locke, even inclining to see Descartes himself as a partisan of occurrent nativism. Through a reinterpretation of the role of Lockean reflection, which is influenced by Reid and Cudworth, he comes to a kind of dispositional nativism which takes into consideration Lockean Empiricism, while rejecting the sensualistic-materialistic interpretations of it. In fact, as Reid had already warned, had the term ‘idea’ been correctly interpreted from the beginning, the dispute upon nativism itself would have vanished in a mere word play.

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38 Ibid., 157.
39 Ibid., 158.
Ryan Nichols’s work *Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception* is the most comprehensive contemporary study of the topic for which the book is named. Nichols devotes the sixth chapter of that work to Reid’s understanding of the difference between primary and secondary qualities, which is of interest both because Reid’s take on this matter seems so much different from other early moderns and because that take is difficult for interpreters to pin down. The author depicts Reid as identifying two categorical distinctions between primary and secondary qualities. First, Nichols argues, the process by which human beings form notions of primary qualities differs from that by which they form notions of secondary qualities. Second, the descriptive ‘contents of the notions’ differ. Notions of primary qualities are clear, whereas those of secondary qualities are relative. Thus, the two-fold difference concerns both the formation of these notions and their contents. However, the first distinction is incorrect, at least as Nichols describes it. When Reid describes notions of primary qualities as *direct*, he does not mean to say anything about their formation. Rather, these terms, like *clear* and *relative*, refer to the notions themselves. Moreover, in positing a formational distinction, Nichols overlooks the aspects of primary and secondary qualities that distinguish them from those qualities which are neither primary nor secondary. And this leads him to populate the primary and secondary quality categories with qualities that fail to fit either of Reid’s descriptions—visible figure, gravity, and the inebriating quality of wine.

Democritus, Descartes, Locke, and Reid all recognize a difference between primary qualities (extension, hardness, motion, and solidity) and secondary qualities (color, sound, smell, taste, and heat). But the first three hold that primary qualities are real mind-independent qualities of physical bodies, whereas the secondary qualities are ‘by convention’, or reducible to primary qualities so as to be ‘nothing in themselves’. On this view, secondary qualities

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2 Democritus, Fragment 9.
depend upon the mind in a way that primary qualities do not. They are ideas, sensations, or relations, but not ‘real’ qualities.\footnote{Ibid., 2.8.17, 2.30.2.}

Reid rejects the explanation that primary and secondary qualities differ with respect to their reality or mind-independence, yet he maintains the categories, offering his own explanation for them. The best summary of his own distinction appears in the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (hereafter, *EIP*\footnote{Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (University Park, PA, 2002).}):

There appears to me to be a real foundation for the distinction; and it is this: That our senses give us a direct and distinct notion of the primary qualities and inform us what they are in themselves: But of the secondary qualities, our senses give us only a relative and obscure notion. They inform us only that they are qualities that affect us in a certain manner, that is, produce in us a certain sensation; but as to what they are in themselves, our senses leave us in the dark. (*EIP*, 2.17/201)

According to Reid, primary and secondary qualities differ in the way they affect human subjects via the senses. Both types of qualities are mind-independent; both are real. The distinction is relative to the conceptions of our minds.

The senses, Reid says, give us a different type of notion of secondary qualities than of primary qualities. He offers several examples that highlight this difference. Consider his example of smelling a rose in the *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*\footnote{Thomas Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (University Park, PA, 1997); hereafter cited in the text as *IHM*.}:

Suppose a person who never had this sense [smell] before, to receive it all at once and to smell a rose … He finds himself affected in a new way, he knows not why or from what cause. Like a man that feels some pain or pleasure formerly unknown to him, he is conscious that he is not the cause of it himself; but cannot, from the nature of the thing, determine whether it is caused by body or spirit, by something near, or by something at a distance. (*IHM* 2.2/26)

… a little experience will discover to him, that the nose is the organ of sense, and that the air, or something in the air, is a medium of it. And finding, by farther experience, that when a rose is near, he has a
certain sensation; when it is removed, the sensation is gone; he finds a connection in nature betwixt the rose and this sensation. The rose is considered as a cause, occasion, or antecedent, of the sensation; the sensation as an effect or consequent of the presence of the rose. \( (IHM\ 2.8/39-40) \)

Reid cuts a sharp distinction between the smell sensation, a mental event, and the smell quality, which is intrinsic to the body. The perceiver understands the sensation clearly since it is purely phenomenological. But nowhere in the process of smelling the rose does the perceiver discover the intrinsic nature of the smell quality, the property of the rose that produces this sensation. That type of understanding comes by way of scientific investigation, not a smell sensation. Reid notes,

> Natural philosophy informs us, that all animal and vegetable bodies, and probably all or most other bodies, while exposed to the air, are continually sending forth effluvia of vast subtilty … All the smell of plants, and of other bodies, is caused by these volatile parts, and is smelled wherever they are scattered in the air. \( (IHM\ 2.1/25) \)

Before consulting the scientist or performing an array of experiments, the perceiver has only a relative understanding of the smell. She considers it by its effect, as the cause of the sensation \( (EIP\ 2.17/202) \), not as effluvia of a body.

Compare the perception of smelling a rose to that of pressing one’s hand against a table. In such a case, Reid claims, one has a sensation, just as when smelling the rose. But the sensation immediately triggers the conception of hardness, the firm adhesion of the parts of the table. He explains,

> There is, no doubt, a sensation by which we perceive a body to be hard or soft. This sensation of hardness may easily be had, by pressing one’s hand against the table, and attending to the feeling that ensues, setting aside, as much as possible, all thought of the table and its qualities, of any external thing. But it is one thing to have the sensation, and another to attend to it, and make it a distinct object of reflection.

> We are so accustomed to use the sensation as a sign, and to pass immediately to the hardness signified … \( (IHM\ 5.2/55-56) \)

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7 See also \( EIP, 2.17/204 \), which reads, ‘When a primary quality is perceived the sensation immediately leads our thought to the quality signified by it and is itself forgot’. 
The perceiver does not need the scientist to explain the nature of hardness. He already understands what hardness is—the firm cohesion of a thing’s parts—and that it is a real quality of a body. The understanding follows automatically upon having the sensation.

The examples make clear what Reid means by ‘direct and distinct’ in the case of primary qualities and ‘relative and obscure’ in the case of secondary qualities. The notion of a primary quality that one gains through the senses describes that quality’s intrinsic nature directly, without reference to anything else (for example, ‘the firm cohesion of the parts of the body’). On the other hand, one’s notion of a secondary quality, if acquired via the senses, involves a reference to the sensation caused by that quality, making the notion relative (for example ‘the cause of that smell sensation’). Moreover, the level of understanding involved in a sensory notion (that is, a notion gained via the senses) of a primary quality is much higher than that of a secondary quality, distinct (indeed, perfectly so)\(^8\) in comparison to the secondary quality notion’s obscurity.

One should also note an important similarity among primary and secondary qualities: notions of both quality types are formed via the senses, with sensations acting as natural signs that trigger their corresponding notions. In every case, a physical quality affects the sense organs in such a way that the perceiver experiences a sensation which leads her to conceive of the quality. Reid explains that sensations act as ‘natural signs’, indicating the qualities to the perceiver. Reid’s signs come in three classes: (1) those whose connection with the thing signified is established by nature but discovered only by experience; (2) those where the connection between the sign and thing signified is not only established by nature but discovered to us by a natural principle without reasoning or experience; and, (3) those which suggest or conjure up a notion of the thing signified by a ‘natural kind of magic’ and at once give us a conception of and belief in it (IHM 5.3/59–60). Sensations caused by secondary qualities belong to the first class—those which prompt scientific investigation in order to discover connections between signs and the things signified, between sensations and qualities. Sensations triggered by primary qualities are of the third class, which suggests no such investigation as they are immediately understood by common sense. Perceptions of both primary and secondary qualities involve sensations. The difference is in the effects that those sensations have on human minds, on what sorts of notions they prompt.

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\(^8\) See *EIP*, 2.17/201.
Nichols reads Reid’s primary-secondary quality distinction as two-fold. He concurs with the above account contrasting the types of notions involved in perceiving primary and secondary qualities, which he describes as a difference in the ‘contents’ of those notions—that is, the description that characterizes the understanding inherent in the notion. But, he claims, primary and secondary qualities also vary with respect to the way their corresponding notions are formed in perceivers’ minds.

Nichols’ interpretation focuses on two passages from Reid’s corpus—the summary of primary and secondary qualities in the seventeenth chapter of The Intellectual Powers (quoted above in full) and a few sentences from a letter to Lord Kames. The letter reads,

You [Lord Kames] say that secondary Qualities have a Relation to a Percipient. I would say rather that our Notion or Conception of them hath a relation to a percipient. The whiteness of this paper, is that Quality in it, which causes a certain sensation in me when I look upon it. Not knowing what this quality is in itself, I form a relative Notion of it viz. That it is that, which causes such a Sensation in the percipient. It will appear evident to any one who considers the common use of the Word (whiteness) that we don’t mean by it in common language, the Sensation, but that in the Body which causes the Sensation…

Of primary qualities Nature hath given us clear and direct perceptions. I know perfectly what figure and extension are in themselves, as well as how they affect my sense. But of Secondary qualities we know onely how they affect the sense not what they are in themselves.

Nichols claims that these two passages ‘contrast the formation of our notions of primary and secondary qualities’. But a careful reading of the sections illuminates no such contrast.

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9 Nichols, Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception, 165–171.
10 J. Todd Buras, ‘The Problem with Thomas Reid’s Direct Realism’, in John Haldane and Stephen Read (eds), The Philosophy of Thomas Reid: A Collection of Essays (Malden, MA, 2003), 44–64, calls this sort of content ‘descriptive’, distinguishing it from the ‘referential content’ of a notion, which is the quality to which the notion refers.
11 Correspondence of Thomas Reid, (University Park, PA, 2002), C 29; cited in Nichols, Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception, 166.
12 Ibid.
To clarify the formational contrast, Nichols offers a formal description of the additional condition he supposes primary qualities must meet:

A perceiver P’s notion of quality Q is a notion of a primary quality only if P apprehends Q, and no intermediary is necessarily apprehended in the process.\(^{13}\)

But even this description might admit of two possible interpretations. The intermediary Nichols has in mind is obviously a sensation. But does he mean that one can perceive a primary quality without noticing the sensation involved, or that one might perceive it without involving a sensation at all? It hardly matters. Both interpretations conflict with Reid’s expositions on primary and secondary qualities.

In either case, much of Nichols’ discussion hinges on Reid’s uses of direct and immediate. He takes direct in *EIP* 2.17 (2) (quoted above) to indicate something distinctive about the way that the mind forms conceptions of primary qualities.\(^{14}\) But this is simply not the case: direct, as explained earlier, indicates the sort of notion one has in response to a primary quality sensation—direct as opposed to relative. The content of the notion makes no reference to the sensation in describing the nature of the quality detected. One understands the quality directly, rather than by way of causal relations to other concepts or events. Using ‘direct’ to modify the way in which the senses give these notions to the mind does not even fit grammatically: the use is adjectival—‘our senses give us a direct and distinct notion’, not adverbial, ‘our senses directly give us’.

Immediate, on the other hand, does indicate something about the way that notions are formed in perception, but not in a way that helps Nichols’ case. Concerning the first possible interpretation, Reid clearly states that one can perceive primary qualities without paying any attention to the sensations involved: When a primary quality is perceived, the sensation immediately leads our thought to the quality signified by it (that is, without inference) and is itself forgot (*EIP*, 2.17/204). He even says it is difficult to notice the sensation, as one’s attention is so quickly drawn to the quality itself (*IHM*, 5.2/56). But this feature of primary qualities does not set them apart from secondary qualities.

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13 Nichols, *Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception*, 167. Nichols argues that such a condition is important for distinguishing Reid’s position from the Way of Ideas, the view attacked in Reid’s *Inquiry*.

One may also perceive color without attending to its accompanying sensation. Reid explains,

In [visually] feeling a coloured body, the sensation is indifferent, and draws no attention. The quality in the body, which we call its colour, is the only object of attention; and therefore we speak of it, as if it were perceived, and not felt.

There are some sensations, which, though they are very often felt, are never attended to, nor reflected upon. We have no conception of them; and therefore, in language, there is neither any name for them, nor any form of speech that supposes their existence. Such are the sensations of colour, and of all primary qualities [italics mine]; and therefore those qualities are said to be perceived, but not to be felt. (EIP, 2.18/212)

Thus, color stands as a glaring counterexample to the idea that secondary qualities might be impossible to perceive without attending to their corresponding visual sensations. Moreover, in several places, Reid discusses the tendency to ignore sensations, in order to focus on the external qualities for which those sensations are natural signs, without mentioning the type of sensations or qualities involved (for example, EIP, 1.6/60–1; IHM, 6.19/166). If Nichols intends that Reid holds that perceivers must notice secondary quality sensations and not primary quality sensations, then these passages contradict him.

The second interpretation will not work either. Conceptions of primary qualities are triggered by sensations. Recall Reid’s explicit distinction, ‘Our senses give us a direct and distinct notion of the primary qualities’ (EIP, 2.17/201). In addition, he says of hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, figure, and motion,

All these, by means of certain corresponding sensations of touch, are presented to the mind as real external qualities; the conception and the belief of them are invariably connected with the corresponding sensations, by an original principle of human nature (IHM, 5.4/62).

Without exception, notions of primary qualities come about because of sensations. At no point does Reid so much as hint at anything to the contrary.

Nichols might respond that the primary quality of visible figure, the quality of a body represented by the two dimensional shape presented in one’s visual
field, lacks a corresponding sensation. But there are two problems with such a response. First, even if one primary quality were perceivable without sensations, such a case would distinguish that quality from all the other qualities, whether primary or secondary. It would not distinguish primary qualities from secondary qualities, except insofar as this odd primary quality would be a member of the set of primary qualities. Second, Reid neither says nor implies that visible figure is a primary quality. Nichols assigns it to the primary qualities on the basis of its mind-independence. But, for Reid, both primary and secondary qualities are mind-independent qualities of bodies, as is apparent in the earlier reference to Reid’s letter to Lord Kames. Mind-independence is not a criterion for distinguishing between primary and secondary qualities on Reid’s scheme or on Nichols’ own interpretation of Reid. Since Reid does not say that visible figure is primary, Nichols owes us a cogent argument for that premise before we can use it to conclude anything about the primary-secondary distinction.

Perhaps it seems counterintuitive that visible figure is not a primary quality and that I owe an argument to the discussion in support of this claim. So here is an argument that, I think, provides prima facie reason to hold this view. By definition, a quality is primary only if an ordinary human perceiver forms a direct and distinct notion of it by means of sense perception alone—non-inferentially. Visible figure, understood directly and distinctly, is ‘the position of the several parts of a figured body with regard to the eye’ (IHM, 6.8/98). To form direct and distinct notions of visible figure, then, one must first understand what a figured body is. But notions of figured bodies come by touch, not by sight. An Idomenian whose only sense is sight (see IHM, 6.9/106–111) has no conception of a three-dimensionally figured body. Therefore, direct and distinct notions of visible figure come by way of memory and induction, not sense perceptions alone. There is no perceptual experience that, alone, triggers a conception of visible figure as the position of the several parts of a figured body with regard to the eye. So, visible figure is not a primary quality, and one cannot use its characteristics to reach sound conclusions concerning the primary-secondary distinction.

There is no exegetical reason to posit any distinction between primary and secondary qualities apart from the one Reid gives explicitly in EIP, 2.17: ‘Our

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16 Ibid., 117.
17 Whiteness is a property of the paper, not a sensation in the mind.
Thomas Reid’s Only Primary-Secondary Quality Distinction

senses give us a direct and distinct notion of the primary qualities and inform us what they are in themselves: But of the secondary qualities, our senses give us only a relative and obscure notion’. He mentions no distinction concerning the formation of those notions. Rather, both primary and secondary quality conceptions are triggered by sensations, which are effected by mind-independent objects interacting with the sense organs.

Nichols’ interpretation leads him to incorrectly assign properties to primary and secondary quality categories that do not meet Reid’s criteria. Visible figure has already been mentioned. But Nichols also places gravity among the secondary qualities. Reid mentions gravity in order to explain the difference between a direct notion and a relative notion (EIP, 2.17/201 – 2). When gravity indicates a tendency of things to move toward the earth, the notion is direct because one knows exactly what a tendency is. When gravity indicates the cause of such a tendency, the notion is relative because one is ignorant of the nature of that cause. Is it curved spacetime, an exchange of subatomic particles, or something completely different? One’s understanding is obscure. But, unlike the secondary qualities, gravity is understood relative to its physical effects on bodies, not sensation types. And, thus, gravity is neither a primary nor a secondary quality, but another sort of occult quality.

Likewise, Nichols labels the inebriating quality of wine a secondary quality. He claims that this is so because his ‘notion of the microphysical nature of alcohol is not direct and clear since it is based on the testimony of chemists’. But why would the testimony of chemists cause a notion to fail in directness or clarity? It has already been argued that Reid’s use of direct has nothing to do with the way in which a notion is formed, whether by way of a chemist’s testimony or psychotropic drugs. Rather, a direct notion is one by which the mind understands a quality in itself, without reference to its effects. The inebriating quality of wine is not a primary quality though, like gravity, notions of it are not relative to sensations (at least not the kind associated with sense perceptions), making it neither primary nor secondary.

Before concluding, I want to point out that a small amendment to Nichols’ formula changes it into a true and important corollary to Reid’s singular primary-secondary quality distinction. This amendment changes the formula

18 Categorizing visible figure is beyond the scope of this paper. It will suffice to say that Reid does not assign visible figure to a particular sense, so it appears that one could come to a conception of it by a variety of means. See IHM 6.7.
19 Nichols, Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception, 171.
20 Ibid., Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception, 181.
21 Ibid., 181 – 2.
so that it describes a difference in the way that perceivers come to understand qualities intrinsically (not merely apprehend them). The new formula reads,

A perceiver P’s notion of quality Q is a notion of a primary quality only if P apprehends Q as it is in itself, and no intermediary is necessarily apprehended in the process.

In other words, a considerable difference between primary and secondary qualities is that, in the case of primary qualities, the perceiver understands the quality in itself by means of perceptions alone and without any other perceptual experiences. By contrast, one comes to understand secondary qualities intrinsically only by means of induction and conceptually relating them to primary qualities. This is why Reid sees secondary qualities as appropriate subjects for scientific investigation while such study is useless in the case of primaries. Moreover, these understandings are what make acquired perceptions possible for Reid.

According to Reid, the physical qualities of bodies interact with the sense organs, triggering sensations in the mind, which, in turn, causes one to form notions of those physical qualities. Primary and secondary qualities differ with respect to the types of notions one forms in such cases. But Nichols goes too far in saying that these qualities necessarily differ with respect to the ways in which they form such notions. And this extra criterion leads him to expand the primary and secondary quality categories beyond Reid’s intended scope.
Two Worlds? Gesture and Speech in Thomas Reid and Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Alex South

Introduction

In this paper I discuss the stances of Thomas Reid and Maurice Merleau-Ponty towards some relationships holding between the activities of perception, gesture and speech. Taking as a starting-point the simple observation that we see gestures and hear speech, I draw out connections between the two philosophers regarding the directedness of intentionality, a direct account of perception, the rejection of a representational theory of mind, and a tight theoretical linking between the perception of things in the world, and the comprehension of others, a linking that Reid effects through a theory of signs. There are also, of course, dis-connections, most importantly over the basic metaphysics of mind and body: Reid is usually taken to be a substance dualist, whereas one of Merleau-Ponty’s primary goals is to dissolve mind-body dualism via a two-pronged appeal to the essential embodiment of mind on the one hand, and an experiencing body-subject on the other. Further, Merleau-Ponty is very concerned with what Heidegger was first to call ‘being-in-the-world’: a theme quite alien to Reid’s epistemological project.

Intentionality as an Innate Principle

I start with the notion of intentionality, used to characterize our mental attitudes as being ‘about’, or perhaps better, ‘directed at’ some entity (using the word broadly so to include things, events and propositions). My visual perceiving of the desk in front of me is directed at the desk; my remembering of this morning’s breakfast is directed at a meal taken earlier today; and my current imagining of a centaur as a creature half-man, half-horse is directed at a mythical creature. It is clear from the last of these examples that our mental attitudes may be about, or directed at, things which do not exist in the ordinary, uncomplicated way in which I take it that individual entities
such as the things in this room exist, or in which my breakfast existed this
morning, and yet, there does seem to be something in common to the way
that I think about desks, breakfasts and centaurs. It is this something in
common, this structure of intentionality, which Franz Brentano identified
as being the defining feature of all mental phenomena in his Psychology from an
Empirical Standpoint (Leipzig, 1874). In so doing he was reviving a Scholastic
term derived from the Latin intendo meaning to aim or point at, yet as Taylor
Carman notes, Brentano gives us ‘a curious hybrid of two very different
conceptions of intentionality’: that is, of directedness and containment.1
As we will see, it is the first of these conceptions which connect Reid and
Merleau-Ponty.

Reid, of course, was thinking and writing a century before Brentano, and
didn’t speak in terms of intentionality. However, Keith Lehrer identifies in
Reid’s thought a ‘principle of intentionality’,2 and quotes from Reid’s Essays
on the Intellectual Powers: ‘I take it for granted, that, in most operations of the
mind, there must be an object distinct from the operation itself. I cannot see,
without seeing something. To see without having any object of sight is absurd.
I cannot remember, without remembering something.’3 This points us in two
directions which require further elaboration: Reid’s innate principles, of which
the principle of intentionality is but one of many; and the idea of perception,
of seeing, as a ‘success notion’. It is the second of these which will prove
most productive in connection with Merleau-Ponty, but I will first begin with
Reid’s innate principles, as they play a foundational role in his ‘common sense’
philosophy, and I return to them below in my discussion of Reid’s ideas on
gesture and language.

Reid maintains that there are certain innate principles, possessed by all
human beings, which do not require and indeed are not open to, proof; rather,
they ‘have such evidence that every man of common understanding readily
assents to them, and finds it absolutely necessary to conduct his actions and
opinions by them’.4 These principles are discoverable not by reason but by
intuition.5 This not to say, however, that we cannot at first be mistaken about
them, but once our judgement is clear of any prejudice we will realize that
we cannot doubt them. These principles, whose denial Reid claims leads to

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3 Thomas Reid, Inquiry and Essays (Indianapolis, 1983), 156.
4 Reid, Inquiry and Essays, 151.
5 Ibid., 152.
absurdity, include what Lehrer refers to as the metaprinciple, a principle given among Reid’s ‘First Principles of Contingent Truths’: ‘That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious.’

The faculties that Reid refers to include those of Perception, Consciousness and Reason, and this metaprinciple is a prime demonstration of Reid’s methodology, in which he demands that we trust the evidence given to us by our external senses just as strongly as we trust the evidence granted us by consciousness of the workings of our minds, or indeed in the results of reason. Reid’s view sets Descartes’ methodological doubt on its head, and resonates strongly with what Merleau-Ponty would later call our ‘perceptual faith’ in *The Visible and the Invisible* (Paris, 1964). Reid argues that it is our lack of trust in perception which has led previous philosophers, including Hume, into the absurdity of denying the real existence of the external world. His own position of common sense metaphysical realism is clearly expressed in what I shall refer to as his ‘principle of existence’: ‘That those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be.’

These principles, of the existence of the external world, and of the existence of an intentional object, operate together in the case of perception. As noted above, they imply that perception is a success notion, that perceiving only counts as perceiving when the consciousness that I am perceiving something is coupled with the actual existence of the thing that I am seeing. Further to these principles, Reid claims that the factors involved in the act of perception are (i) the external object and its qualities; (ii) the sensation(s) caused in us by this object; (iii) a mental conception of this object, and (iv) an ‘irresistible conviction’ in the existence of the object. An implication of this is that the operation of conception (which includes the imagination), must be distinguished from perception, and indeed Reid does this by making perception and conception separate faculties of the mind. The distinguishing feature of conception is that it ‘is not employed solely about things which have existence’; in other words, its intentional object does not have to exist. It is worth emphasizing that for Reid a conception is not a mental object, but an operation of the mind directed at an intentional object.

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8 Ibid., 272.
Intentionality and Phenomenology

I return here to intentionality, and move to the twentieth-century movement of phenomenology and its founder, Edmund Husserl. Husserl had attended Brentano’s lectures in Vienna and was impressed by his claim that intentionality was the mark of the mental: indeed, the slogan ‘all consciousness is consciousness of something’ became the rallying cry of the phenomenologists as they set out to describe the essential structures of experience from the first person perspective. According to the ‘West Coast’ reading put forward by philosophers such as Dagfinn Føllesdal and Hubert Dreyfus, in Husserl’s thought the concept of intentionality has more to do with containment than directedness, with the focus moving away from the intentional object to the intentional content, or noema of a thought; meaning how the object is given to us, or how we might try to put it into words.\(^{11}\) Furthermore, Husserl deliberately refuses to consider the connection between thought and world: as part of his phenomenological reduction the existence of the object of thought is ‘bracketed’, and he focuses on what he sees as the essential intentional structure of consciousness itself.

Husserl, therefore, is a philosopher whose version of intentionality may be said to have little in common with that of Reid. However, in Merleau-Ponty we see a rejection of the phenomenological reduction (‘The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction’\(^ {12}\)), and a turning towards a more literal reading of the directedness of intentionality, at least as regards perception. In part this is due to his focus on the body, and his insistence that we cannot understand perception if we take it as a purely mental phenomenon. For Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenological description of perception must include both the passive aspects of sense experience and the active aspects of the motor skills which are called on to optimize my ‘grip’ on my world. So, for example, the muscles of my eyes, head, and neck are in a constant play of contraction and relaxation as I look around the room or read a text, even though I am usually unaware of them and indeed may have no conscious control over them. Merleau-Ponty sometimes refers to this aspect of perception as the body schema: meaning by this the dynamic set of preconscious and subpersonal bodily attitudes which both constrains and enables our conscious and intentional mental attitudes.

towards things and events in our world.\textsuperscript{13} Shaun Gallagher suggests the example of reading a text in bad light, which may lead to me squinting and developing a headache: even before becoming aware of my discomfort I may start to find the text difficult or boring. Only later awareness of my discomfort and subsequent reflection reveals how my bodily response to the dimness of the light influenced my conscious intentional beliefs about the text. It is the body schema, then, which controls our literal orientation in the world, our directedness towards particular objects or to the world more generally, and as such Merleau-Ponty characterizes it as a bodily intentionality.

This bodily intentionality neither belongs to the body characterized, in a Cartesian or Reidian way, as extension; nor to the mind characterized as a thinking thing. For part of Merleau-Ponty’s criticism of Cartesian dualism is that it gives us no metaphysical room to describe my experience of my body, and indeed his \textit{Phenomenology of Perception} is in large part a phenomenology of what he calls \textit{le corps propre} (literally: one’s own body). \textit{Le corps propre} does not simply feature in our experience as an object of our awareness: rather it conditions and structures our very awareness of the world, and it is this partially anonymous ‘body-subject’ which is the subject of perception.\textsuperscript{14} The body-subject is an attempt to return to a pretheoretical grasp of the body; it is ‘my point of view upon the world’.\textsuperscript{15} Carman describes this bodily point of view as the middle ground between disembodied intellect and objective body, not just lying between them, but also providing their ground, ‘for it is what they depend upon and presuppose’.\textsuperscript{16}

According to Merleau-Ponty, then, the intentionality of perception essentially depends upon the directedness of the bodily attitudes involved. The fact that perception cannot be divorced from its embodiment in a corporeal agent, and its embeddedness in a world, means that for Merleau-Ponty too perception is a success notion.\textsuperscript{17} He writes that ‘[p]erception is precisely that kind of act in which there can be no question of setting the act itself apart from the end to which it is directed … If I see an ash-tray, \textit{in the full sense of the word see}, there must be an ash-tray there … To see is to see something.’\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} J. N. Mohanty, ‘Intentionality’ in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds), \textit{A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism} (Oxford, 2009), 75.
\textsuperscript{15} Maurice Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}, 81.
\textsuperscript{16} Carman, \textit{Merleau-Ponty}, 78.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{18} Merleau-Ponty, \textit{Phenomenology of Perception}, 435–6.
is striking how Merleau-Ponty expresses his conclusion about perception in almost exactly the same terms as Reid, terms which allow us to characterize them both as direct realists: they both deny that in our experience there are ‘representations’ mediating between the acts or operations of the mind and its independently existing objects.

Representationalism

Reid was motivated by a desire to refute David Hume’s scepticism about the external world, which he considered an absurdity. In Reid’s interpretation of Hume, what we are immediately presented with in the mind are impressions and ideas. This so-called ‘Ideal Theory’ is usually taken to entail an indirect account of perception: our perception of an external object is always mediated by some kind of representation in the mind. Hume’s argument for this in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* runs as follows: when I see a table, I must have an idea before my mind, because when I move away from the table my perception of it—its appearance—changes, though the qualities of the ‘real’ table are assumed to stay the same.19

Hume thought, and Reid thought he was right to think, that if the Ideal theory were true we could never get beyond the representations to the objects themselves, and thus we are condemned to scepticism. As Lehrer points out, Reid realized that no amount of introspection or ‘attentive reflection’ revealed to him these representations, that they were ‘a mere fiction of philosophers’.20 Furthermore, Reid has a reply for Hume’s argument which he bases on the difference between apparent and real magnitude: ‘Let us suppose, for a moment, that it is the real table we see: Must not this real table seem to diminish as we remove farther from it? It is demonstrable that it must. How then can this apparent diminution be an argument that it is not the real table?’21

Here I interpret Reid as realizing that our perception of a thing is necessarily perspectival, is a ‘view from somewhere’: and also that this is no reason to distrust the senses. And this is very close to Merleau-Ponty’s insistence that the perspectival nature of perception is not a fault in perception, as a Descartes or Hume might maintain, but is part of its essential character;

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though Merleau-Ponty goes further, of course, in insisting that this perspec-
tival nature is a consequence of embodiment.
Merleau-Ponty’s own rejection of representationalism is based on a
careful phenomenological description of our perceptual experience, leading
to a radical, and currently very influential view of perception, in which it
is recognized that the activity of our senses is thoroughly bound up with
bodily movement. He gives the example of a skilled typist who is typing
out a manuscript, and emphasizes that it is wrong to consider this ‘as if the
perception of a letter written on paper aroused the representation of the same
letter which in turn aroused the representation of the movement needed to
strike it on the machine.’ To do this is to ignore the role of the practical
‘knowledge in the hands’ possessed by the typist. For the possessor of this
kind of knowledge or know-how, looking at the manuscript with the intention
to type it out elicits patterns of movements which are performed in a ‘manual
space’ without any requirement for explicit representations. Furthermore,
Merleau-Ponty’s rejection of representationalism is an expression of his
thesis of the ‘primacy of perception’: that is, that perception is not merely
the means by which perceivers gain information about the world, but should
rather be viewed ‘as a mode of being in the world, an existential condition of
the very possibility of representations—imaginative, semantic, or otherwise
cognitive—intervening between ourselves and the world.’

In summary, Merleau-Ponty gives us a descriptive account rather than an
explanatory theory of perception, in which perception is characterized as a
success notion, essentially perspectival and embodied, intimately related to
movement and taking place in a world. Rather than straightforwardly an act of
the mind, it is the ‘background from which all acts stand out’.

Direct Perception and ‘Direct Comprehension’

Thus far I have focused on the activity of perception in its traditional
application to things, loosely speaking: in its application to the sights, sounds,
smells and so on of the objects we encounter in the world around us. But
of course perception also enables us to see gestures and to hear speech,

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22 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 166.
23 Ibid.
and thus it is both natural and revealing that Reid introduces his thoughts about language in his *Inquiry into the Human Mind* in the section titled ‘Of Hearing’, for this implicitly brings his theory of language within his theory of sense-perception. Reid writes that ‘One of the noblest purposes of sound undoubtedly is language, without which mankind would hardly be able to attain any degree of improvement above the brutes.’ An explicit theoretical link between language and perception is provided by his theory of signs, and indeed Reid goes on to tell us that ‘By language I understand all those signs which mankind use in order to communicate to others their thoughts and intentions, their purposes and desires.’

**Artificial and Natural Signs**

I will shortly explain how signs feature in perception, but first I present Reid’s distinction between ‘artificial’ and ‘natural’ signs, and the concomitant distinction between artificial and natural languages. Once again he relies heavily on the idea of innate principles: artificial signs are those whose meaning is attached to them ‘by compact or agreement’; whereas natural signs are those ‘which every man understands by the principles of his nature’. And, in a careful way which permits the ordinary language we speak to each other to be both natural and artificial at once, he specifies that ‘Language, so far as it consists of artificial signs, may be called artificial; so far as it consists of natural signs, I call it natural.’

This distinction is used in Reid’s investigation into the origins of language, in an argument designed to demonstrate that the existence of artificial language relies on the prior existence of natural language, and that the possession of artificial language is unique to human beings: in a familiar thought, it is the possession of words which distinguishes man from other living creatures. Reid’s argument is ingenious, and is premised on the idea mentioned above, that the connection between words and their meanings is arbitrary: that meaning is affixed to words by a process of agreement among the members of a linguistic community. To forestall the obvious objection, let us read him charitably as only asserting a requirement of tacit agreement. The ingenious part lies in his further claim that only human beings possess the

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27 Ibid., 33.
28 Ibid.
Two Worlds? Gesture and Speech in Thomas Reid and Maurice Merleau-Ponty

innate principles of ‘contracts and covenants’, and of the ‘moral obligation to perform them’.29 These natural principles, which lie within our moral faculty of Conscience, are said to be expressed in natural signs. It is only through our expression of these principles that language-users would ever agree on the particular meanings to be attached to particular words.

Reid goes on to offer a three-fold taxonomy of the natural signs, the ‘elements of the natural language of mankind’: these are the ‘modulations of the voice, gestures, and features’ which express our basic thoughts, emotions, and desires.30 Here he seems to be on more conventional ground—we find this idea of a natural language in Rousseau, Condillac and other Enlightenment thinkers—and it is surely inspired in part by the explorers’ tales circulating in Europe at this period of the expansion of empire, and colonization overseas. It’s not surprising to read, then, that through the use of their natural language ‘two savages who have no common artificial language, can converse together; can communicate their thoughts in some tolerable manner; can ask and refuse, affirm and deny, threaten and supplicate’.31 From the vantage point of our own era I note the irony involved: it would presumably have been rather more common for the colonizing parties to have had to call upon a natural language in order to threaten the so-called savages. However, from a philosophical-historical perspective it is more important to note the echo of the contemporary cult of the ‘noble savage’ in Reid’s praise of the use of natural language and his decrying of its loss in ‘civilized life’. Natural signs, when combined with artificial signs, are said to give ‘force and energy to language’,32 and to make it more expressive and persuasive. The perfection of language as a whole, which is found in the performances of the actor and the orator, rather than in a written text, therefore includes natural language. Indeed, Reid puts this point in a way which is rather suggestive for Merleau-Ponty’s gestural theory of speech: ‘Where speech is natural, it will be an exercise, not of the voice and lungs only, but of all the muscles of the body’.33

Briefly mentioned here in Reid’s Inquiry and further elaborated in his Lectures on the Fine Arts, is the idea of an aesthetic realm lying between the realms of the body and the mind. An avenue which I reluctantly leave unexplored, but would clearly have bearing upon the issue of mind/body dualism, is a

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 34.
33 Ibid.
further connection between Reid and Merleau-Ponty based upon their shared expressivist theory of the arts.

Theory of Natural Signs

But to come back to Reid’s tight theoretical connection between perception and language, this is found a little further on in the Inquiry, shortly after he summarizes his account of touch: ‘[B]y an original principle of our constitution, a certain sensation of touch both suggests to the mind the conception of hardness, and creates the belief of it: or, in other words, that this sensation is a natural sign of hardness.’ Reid goes on to draw parallels between the natural signs of a natural language that we have been discussing, sensations themselves as the natural signs of the qualities of external bodies, and furthermore the regularities of nature studied by natural philosophers and known more commonly as causes and effects (for example, that smoke is a sign of fire). In all these phenomena, the connection between sign and that which is signified is established by nature, but whereas this connection is ‘discovered only by experience’ in the case of natural philosophy, in the case of perception and natural language the connection is ‘discovered to us by a natural principle, without reasoning or experience’. So, for example, even a new-born baby can be frightened by an expression of anger, and calmed by smiles, because it possesses innate principles of mind that allow it to recognize that such signs stand for certain emotions.

Reid further explores this parallel between natural language and perception when he comes to consider the case of language as a source of knowledge. As Lehrer puts it, ‘Nature has, in both cases, established the connection between the sign and the thing signified and has taught us the interpretation of the signs. The signs of natural language and original perception “have the same signification in all climates, and in all nations; and the skill of interpreting them is not acquired, but innate”.’ Lehrer points out out this use of innate principles by Reid gives him a response to two pressing problems posed by the Ideal Theory of the mind, the problem of the existence of the external world, and the problem of other minds. In the case of natural language, it is

34 Ibid., 41.
35 Ibid., 42.
36 Ibid., 42–3.
37 Lehrer, Thomas Reid, 74.
of course the problem of other minds that is solved: ‘In the case of other minds, we have a conception of mental operations from our consciousness of them. The problem is not that of obtaining a conception of mental operations of others. It is to determine what behaviour signifies those operations in that the operations of others are ‘invisible’ to us.’

Lehrer’s reading of Reid’s response here suggests that Reid is arguing by analogy, which would open him up to the powerful critique mounted by Wittgenstein in his argument against the possibility of a private language. However, Reid himself addresses the issue further in his Essays on the Intellectual Powers, where he states two further first principles relating to other minds: ‘That there is life and intelligence in our fellow-men with whom we converse,’ and ‘That certain features of the countenance, sounds of the voice, and gestures of the body, indicate certain thoughts and dispositions of mind.’ The first of these is said to be one of those irresistible and unshakeable convictions, and is on a par with what I earlier called Reid’s ‘principle of existence’ which applies to all the objects of perception. Just as we have an unshakeable belief in the existence of the everyday objects around us, so do we have a belief that our fellow-men are more than automata, that they are living, thinking beings. The second principle is a restatement of the idea that certain perceptible characteristics of a human being immediately give rise in us to conceptions of the thoughts or emotions which they signify. Here, Reid goes on to reveal his mind-body dualism very clearly, in an argument designed to show that these conceptions are indeed innate:

When we see the sign, and see the thing signified always conjoined with it, experience may be the instructor, and teach us how that sign is to be interpreted. But how shall experience instruct us when we see the sign only, when the thing signified is invisible? … thoughts and passions of the mind, as well as the mind itself, are invisible, and therefore their connection with any sensible sign cannot be first discovered by experience; there must be some earlier source of this knowledge. Nature seems to have given men a faculty of sense, by which this connection is perceived. And the operation of this sense is very analogous to that of the external senses.

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38 Ibid., 45.
40 Reid, Inquiry and Essays, 277–8.
41 Ibid., 279.
42 Ibid., 280.
This turns on the truth of the premise that our thoughts and emotions in themselves, are invisible to others, and incidentally allows Reid to distinguish the way we learn about the mental attitudes of others from the way in which we carry out natural science, that is in the establishing of scientific laws through the observation of regularities in nature. For if our emotions themselves were visible, then they too could be learnt about through experience.

In summary: Reid’s account of the mind is a faculty theory which places great importance on perception and a common sense view of the world of things and people which we experience. His account of the mind includes a set of innate principles, including one of intentionality, and includes arguments against the representational, or Ideal Theory of mind. Reid’s theory of signs unites his accounts of perception and natural language, and suggests to me that we might call the comprehension of gestures and other natural signs displayed by fellow human beings ‘direct comprehension’, by analogy with his theory of direct perception. Finally, Reid’s metaphysics of mind and body is a dualist one.

It is this final point which brings us to a fundamental disagreement between Reid and Merleau-Ponty: although Reid rejects the Ideal Theory of mind, he retains the Cartesian premise that mind and body are essentially different. At the beginning of the Essays on the Intellectual Powers, Reid writes: “The essence both of body and mind is unknown to us. We know certain properties of the first, and certain operations of the last, and by these only we can define or describe them. We define body to be that which is extended, solid, moveable, divisible. In like manner, we define mind to be that which thinks.” Here is not the place to examine how Reid might have responded to the problem of mind-body interaction, except to note that his defence would certainly have drawn upon the innate sign-signified connections about which I have already spoken. I consider this to be a rather unsatisfactory tactic, as it simply leaves us with something we can investigate no further.

For Merleau-Ponty on the other hand, a rejection of the dichotomy between mind and body is at the heart of his entire project, and we have seen him starting this project by placing primary importance on a perceiving and moving body-subject capable of carrying out skilful practical activities, and characterized by a bodily intentionality. Following Carman, I have previously referred to it as the middle ground between objective body and disembodied intellect. This body-subject is then the necessary background for our conscious

43 Ibid., 132–3.
intentional mental attitudes, which may also involve the use of language and the exercise of our capacities for judgement and reasoning. And it is to Merleau-Ponty’s account of gesture and speech found in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that I now turn, an account which in treating these activities as expressive and meaningful movements allows us to see them as a natural development from other practical skills exhibited by the body-subject.

**The Worlds of Gesture and Speech**

I come now to the way in which Merleau-Ponty connects his accounts of perception and language. He hopes to provide us with a detailed phenomenology of gesture and speech, in which he will not only aim to take us back to a pretheoretical description of how things seem to us, but through an examination of the structures of experience will claim to provide an account of the bodily preconditions of this experience.

In Merleau-Ponty, I suggest, the key to the connection is to be found in his claim that the body itself is the ‘mediator of a world’, or is ‘our general medium for having a world’. The world of perception is the world of perceptible objects, this much is obvious, but I should point out immediately that for Merleau-Ponty this world is not the objective, or scientifically-describable world in which photons and pheromones carry information to a body which can be captured in its entirety in a web of quantum mechanical wave functions. Neither is it the philosopher’s world of primary and secondary qualities or the sensations resulting from such qualities. Rather, this world is the irreducible Husserlian *Lebenswelt*, the subjective human world of everyday objects which have meaning or value for us, as human agents. In this world things appear differently to me depending on my past experience. To a child who has been burnt fire looks different to a child who has not. This is not to say that these objects and this world cannot be characterized scientifically, but it is to say that for the experiencing subject such a reduction cannot ever satisfactorily characterize the experience of living in it. This world, then, is the world of the perceiving and moving body-subject.

Naturally, the *Lebenswelt* is also a world of ‘others’, and Merleau-Ponty seeks to describe how we interact and communicate with them. In the following extract from the *Phenomenology of Perception*, we see once again

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how Merleau-Ponty rejects any notion of conscious translation from inner thought to outer behaviour and back, and in the ‘immediate’ reading of a gesture we also have a connection with what I called above Reid’s direct comprehension:

When I motion my friend to come nearer, my intention is not a thought prepared within me and I do not perceive the signal in my body. I beckon across the world, I beckon over there, where my friend is; the distance between us, his consent or refusal are immediately read in my gesture; there is not a perception followed by a movement, for both form a system which varies as a whole. If, for example, realizing that I am not going to be obeyed, I vary my gesture, we have here, not two distinct acts of consciousness. What happens is that I see my partner’s unwillingness, and my gesture of impatience emerges from this situation without any intervening thought.46

In this exchange between friends, just as in the typist’s interaction with the typewriter, we see how perception and movement form a unified system, and in addition it is clear that because of this perception and gesture can also work together; after all, gesture necessarily involves movement. Merleau-Ponty further claims that our gestures are intentional movements, displaying the bodily intentionality possessed by the body subject, and that communication is achieved when a dynamic reciprocity is established between the intentions of the one party and the behaviour of the other. Communication is an act of understanding, but this act is not one carried out by some pure calculating intellect: rather, it is a ‘bodily understanding’ taking place in the body-subject. He writes, ‘The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person’s intention inhabited my body and mine his. The gesture which I witness outlines an intentional object. This object is genuinely present and fully comprehended when the powers of my body adjust themselves to it and overlap it.’47

These passages help to demonstrate the connection between Reid and Merleau-Ponty: in Merleau-Ponty’s statement that ‘I see my partner’s unwillingness’ we recognize a description of a common sense account of

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46 Ibid., 127.
our awareness of the emotional states of another, and a spelling out of an exchange couched in natural language, which Reid would surely have accepted. However, they also reveal the differences between the two philosophers, in Merleau-Ponty’s continual emphasis of the importance of the role of the body in our intentional states. This is both a deliberate undermining of the kind of dualist talk common even amongst professed materialists, and an attempt to recover what our bodies are for us as experiencing and embodied agents acting in a world. As Carman puts it, ‘experience is simply not the sort of thing that has sharp metaphysical boundaries, either inside or outside the material world’.48

The message is clear enough: in the perceptible world we can communicate through gestures. Yet as pointed out above, Merleau-Ponty wishes to go further, to give a phenomenology of speech. For gestures tend to be limited to the expression of relatively simple thoughts and emotions, and it is our verbal speech which implies rationality. Hence even if a dualist might accept that our passions are partly bodily, the rational intellect has often been considered something pure and disembodied, only contingently attached to a body. If Merleau-Ponty can find a means of insisting that even the exercise of our rational intellect is essentially embodied, then he comes another step closer towards making plausible his rejection of mind-body (or consciousness-matter) dualism.

In going beyond gestures to speech, Merleau-Ponty offers a wealth of phenomenological evidence, and there is space here only to sketch out a single line of approach. This amounts, roughly speaking, to an argument by analogy, an analogy between a perceptible world of objects and a linguistic world of meaningful words. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty frequently refers to the ‘gestural meaning’ of a word, by which he seems to mean something like the total meaning of a word, in which its conceptual and emotional meanings are intermingled. And in this we see an echo of Reid’s privileging of natural language. According to Merleau-Ponty, a word is not only a sign standing for something else, it is also literally the expression of a thought which must take place in the spatio-temporal world of perception. If a gesture is a patterned movement of the body, so also is a word. But whereas the gesture ‘outlines an intentional object’ in the perceptible world, a word functions in the linguistic world. Replying to the objection that whereas the perceptible world is in some sense ‘given’, the linguistic world must be acquired, Merleau-Ponty claims that

the linguistic world is provided by our cultural background.49 In answer to the objection that this is all just metaphorical, that meanings have no real existence, Merleau-Ponty develops a parallel with an expressivist theory of aesthetic meaning, and claims that just as the meaning of a piece of music has no existence beyond its sounding notes, so the meanings of thought have no existence beyond inner or outer speech.50

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty asserts that for the language user the linguistic world exists just as surely as the perceptible world. The utterance of a word is simply a possible use of my body and I know where to find words as I know how to locate a part of my body: which is to say in the practical employment of the body schema. In an echo of Heidegger’s focus on our practical and concernful dealings with ‘ready-to-hand’ objects in the world, Merleau-Ponty writes: ‘I reach back for the word as my hand reaches towards the part of my body which is being pricked; the word has a certain location in my linguistic world, and is part of my equipment. I have only one means of representing it, which is uttering it, just as the artist has only one means of representing the work on which he is engaged: by doing it’.51 Here we find also another statement of Merleau-Ponty’s extension of an expressivist theory of aesthetic meaning to linguistic meaning, and a development of his rejection of a representational theory of mind.

To summarize Merleau-Ponty’s position on gesture and speech, I quote a passage to reinforce the message that it is being-in-the-world with which he is chiefly concerned, in language just as in perception. It is our experience of existing in a world that has meaning for us that he seeks to describe, and the way in which our behaviour, whether verbal or non-verbal, involves both the interpretation and the creation of this meaning.

What then does language express, if it does not express thoughts? It presents or rather is the subject’s taking up of a position in the world of his meanings. The term ‘world’ here is not a manner of speaking; it means that the ‘mental’ or cultural life borrows its structures from natural life and that the thinking subject must have its basis in the body-subject. The phonetic ‘gesture’ brings about, both for the speaking subject and for his hearers, a certain structural co-ordination of experience, a certain modulation of existence, exactly as a pattern

50 Ibid., 212–13.
51 Ibid., 210.
of my bodily behaviour endows the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others.\textsuperscript{52}

**Conclusion**

I have begun to explore the two worlds of Reid and Merleau-Ponty, and their two worlds of perception and comprehension. I have suggested that the two thinkers are united in their conception of intentionality as directedness; as proponents of a direct account of perception as a success notion and as essentially perspectival; in their rejection of a representational theory of mind; and in a concern for an accurate description of our conscious experience. Here, Reid’s arguments against Hume are still of vital relevance to the contemporary debate regarding the representational nature of mind. Both thinkers too seek to bring together perception and comprehension, though Reid’s system is structured around a Cartesian mind-body dualism, and I suggest that Merleau-Ponty’s description of gesture and speech as based in a body-subject’s moving and sensing relationship with its world offers us not only a richer and thoroughly existential phenomenology but also a more detailed account of the relationship holding between these activities.

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\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 225; translation corrected.
The intellectual capacities of children, especially their capacity for reasoning, is a topic of great interest in current discussions about primary and secondary school education. This is due, in part, to the fact that pupils in such schools appear to gain benefits from doing philosophy.¹ ‘Philosophy for children’ is an enterprise that got started in the late sixties by Matthew Lipman. He stressed the importance for children to practice their intellectual capacities of judgment and reasoning, as it helps them to think for themselves.² Philosophers of education such as John Dewey and Lef Vygotsky likewise have attached great value to autonomous thinking.³

In this paper we aim to bring to the discussion about philosophy with children a number of remarks made by the eighteenth century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid, especially in his Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, about the intellectual capacities of children.⁴ The project of this paper, then, is to discuss the relevance of Reid’s philosophical thoughts about children for contemporary philosophy with children.

Children and Perception

In a philosophy for children session, a very common question to be asked by children aged 5 is ‘How do I know what is real?’⁵ Apparently even at that age children wonder about existence and non-existence. Lipman and several

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⁴ Whether the role of the infant in Reid’s work is identical to the roles of the fool, the madman and the brute is a highly interesting topic, but one that will have to await another occasion.
⁵ G. Matthews, Philosophy and the Young Child (Cambridge, MA, 1980).
others have devised teaching materials to help children to think this through, group wise or alone. When Reid writes about perception, he gives prominence to the notion of existence, and furthermore develops various thoughts about perception by children.\(^6\)

According to Reid three things are implied in every act of perception:

First, some conception or notion of the object perceived. Secondly, a strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence. And, thirdly, that this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (EIP, 96)\(^7\)

An act of perception, then, involves among other things ‘a strong and irresistible conviction and belief in the present existence’ of the object perceived. One cannot perceive an object, and not believe that it exists. This is not to deny that one can see a kumquat and not believe that what one sees is a kumquat. What is not possible is that one sees a kumquat and believe that what one sees does not exist. This existential belief, Reid says, is ‘immediate’, by which he means that ‘it is not by a train of reasoning and argumentation that we come to be convinced of the existence of what we perceive’ (EIP, 99–100).

To this Reid adds an important qualification: what is just said is true only of persons that have the capacity to ‘[…] distinguish objects of mere imagination from things which have a real existence’ (EIP, 100). And: ‘I speak of the power of perception in those that are adult, and of a sound mind, who believe that there are some things which do really exist; and that there are many things conceived by themselves, and by others, which have no existence’ (EIP, 100). So what Reid says about what is implied by perception is true only of properly developed adults, not of children. His account of perception requires that the subject is able to distinguish between ‘what really exists’ and ‘what exists only in the imagination’. Children, he suggests, may lack this ability: ‘whether children, from the time that they begin to use their senses, make a distinction between things which really exist, may be doubted. Until we are able to make this distinction, we cannot properly be said to believe or to disbelieve the

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\(^6\) Reid’s account of perception is more thoroughly discussed in R. Van Woudenberg, ‘Perceptual Relativism, Scepticism, and Thomas Reid’. In Reid Studies 3 (2000), 65–85 at 70–81.

\(^7\) References are to Thomas Reid, Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man (Pennsylvania, 2002).
existence of anything. The belief of the existence of anything seems to suppose a notion of existence; a notion too abstract, perhaps, to enter into the mind of an infant’ (EIP, 100)

The implication of this line of thought is far reaching. For if perception involves belief in the existence of the object perceived; and if belief in the existence of something requires that the subject is capable of distinguishing between ‘what really exists’ and ‘what exists only in the imagination’; and if, finally, children are not capable of making that distinction, then the conclusion must be that children do not perceive!

When we take Reid’s thought on perception seriously, then, we may hypothesize that the sooner a child is capable of distinguishing between existence and non-existence, the sooner s/he will be capable of having beliefs of the form ‘X exists’, and hence the sooner s/he will be capable of perceiving things. And so, we may hypothesize further, by having children work with teaching materials that stimulate them to think about the notion of existence, they may thereby further the development of their capacities for perception. Whether this hypothesis is correct or not cannot be decided from the philosophical armchair. But it should be possible to empirically test it.

**Children and Trains of Thought**

One exercise that is used in doing philosophy with children, is to ask a child to repeat what has been said by others before responding to it. This helps children to capture the claim or line of thought that was put forward by the teacher, or one of their classmates. It also helps the child to evaluate whether what s/he wants to say is relevant and to the point. Very often this exercise is rather difficult for young children, but it becomes easier when it is practiced.8

Reid discusses the topic of ‘trains of thought’ that occur in the human mind. His discussion, if correct, explains why it is unsurprising that young infants have a hard time performing the exercise mentioned.

Some trains of thought, Reid affirms, are spontaneous. There is no underlying principle governing them; they flow through the mind spontaneously, like water from a fountain. Reid’s example is of a man whose work of the day is over and lies down to relax his body and mind: ‘he cannot

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cease from thinking, though he desires it. Something occurs to his fancy; that is followed by another thing, and so his thoughts are carried on from one object to another, until sleep closes the scene’ (EIP, 336) Other trains of thought, by contrast, are regulated and directed by an active effort of the person; they have ‘a beginning, middle, and an end, an arrangement of its parts, according to some rule, or with some intention’ (EIP, 341) Examples are ‘the conception of a design, and of the means of executing it; the conception of a whole, and the number and order of the parts’ (EIP, 341). So when your goal is to get your piano to the fifth floor and you are pondering how to best get it there, you are engaged in a regular train of thought; likewise, when you think of how the various parts of a clock contribute to the clock’s main function, you are engaged in a regular train of thought.

To be able to have trains of thought, Reid claims, one must have the power to distinguish between design and non-design. At this junction he turns to children: ‘It does not appear to me that children have any regular trains of thought until this power begins to operate…. It seems, therefore, that this power is connected with all regular trains of thought, and may be the cause of them’ (EIP, 341). We may take Reid to endorse the view here that the power at hand is at least a necessary condition for having regular trains of thought (this is suggested by the phrase that the two are ‘connected’); and that he is open to the view that it might even be a sufficient condition (this is suggested by the phrase that the one ‘may be the cause’ of the other).

In discussing the power to distinguish design from non-design, Reid’s examples of regular trains of thought are all of the reproductive kind. We find regular trains of thought, Reid held, in two-year-old children. His reason for thinking so is that ‘they can then give attention to the operations of older children in making their little houses, and ships, and other such things’ (EIP, 341), and he further says that ‘[a]s children grow up, they are delighted with tales, with childish games, with designs and stratagems: everything of this kind stores the fancy with a new regular train of thought.” (EIP, 342) The claim clearly is that children enjoy the building of little houses and so on because the power to distinguish between design and non-design has been awakened in them: when they see older children build miniature houses they distinguish a heap of materials from design. We call the regular trains of thought aroused by such things as the building of little houses ‘reproductive’ because they spot design that is already there.

Not all regular trains of thought, of course, are reproductive. Some invent design not yet present. Such trains of thought we might call ‘inventive’. Is
the power to distinguish between design and non-design also necessary for inventive trains of thought? Although Reid doesn’t explicitly say so, the answer must clearly be affirmative. If one wants to bring about C, one must know what will and what won’t lead to C’s occurrence—and this involves distinguishing design from non-design. For example, if one wants to write a book, one must be able to distinguish between a random jumble of words, and a meaningful sequence thereof. Without the ability to distinguish design from non-design, the book, which documents a regular train of thought, cannot be written.

Reid held that reproductive regular trains of thought precede inventive regular trains of thought. One cannot have the latter unless one has, or has had, the former. Here Reid assigns a special role to imitation, in other words, to our ability to copy what we see in the actions and words of others. Says Reid: ‘Man is the most imitative of all animals; he not only imitates with intention, and purposely, what he thinks has any grace or beauty, but even without intention, he is led by a kind of instinct, which it is difficult to resist, into the modes of speaking, thinking, and acting, which he has been accustomed to see in his early years’ (EIP, 343). By imitating others, we get, so to speak, a feel for what it is like to speak, act and think purposefully. To this imitated repertoire we may next make our own additions and innovations—thus engaging in inventive regular trains of thought. But Reid has a modest view as to the extent of such additions and innovations: ‘in the bulk of mankind [they] are not very considerable’ (EIP, 343). This is because ‘the power of invention is distributed among men more unequally than almost any other’ (EIP, 342).

If Reid is correct in all of this, we may hypothesize, first, that the sooner children are capable of distinguishing between design and non-design, the sooner they will be capable to have regular reproductive trains of thought. Second, if children delight in (listening to) tales, in playing games and so on, the capacity for distinguishing design from non-design and hence the capacity to have regular reproductive trains of thought have come into existence. And this, thirdly, suggests a further hypothesis: if we want children to have regular reproductive trains of thought, it is helpful to read them stories, tell them tales, let them see other children make little houses and ships, let them play games. This latter hypothesis, we suppose, can be empirically tested.

If the third hypothesis is true, this will be relevant for doing philosophy with children. After all, philosophizing is having, or aiming to have, regular trains of thought. The exercise used in doing philosophy with children that was alluded to at the beginning of this section (children are asked to repeat what has been said by others before they respond to it), will help them to have
the thoughts of others before their own minds and to see whether or not what they were inclined to say is on target—that is, whether or not it constitutes a regular train of thought. Hence the exercise can be seen as one more way to reach the same goal that telling stories, building ships aim at: it helps children develop regular trains of thought. And so the exercise is one that Reid would endorse. Powers, says Reid, are ‘… greatly improved by being used’ (EIP, 59). If this is correct, the exercise will improve the children’s capacities for having regular trains of thought.

**Children and the Faculty of Judgment**

Lipman, sensibly, values the power of judgment, since it is strongly connected with autonomous thinking. The capacity for judgment should therefore be strengthened in childhood. He explains that judgments of identity, similarity and difference, are needed in order to make judgments such as judgment of inference, composition and relevance. Practicing such judgments will help children to have more sagacious culminating judgments.9 So, according to Lipman, children need to practice the power of judgment in order that they can develop a good sense of judgment.

Reid too has much to say about the capacity of judgment in children. In a very interesting passage he considers the differences between a child and an adult when both are looking at a cube of brass:

Suppose a cube of brass to be presented at the same time to a child of a year old and to a man. The regularity of the figure will attract the attention of both. Both have the senses of sight and of touch in equal perfection; and therefore, if anything be discovered in this object by the man, which cannot be discovered by the child, it must be owing, not to the senses, but to some other faculty which the child has not yet attained. (EIP, 417)

In his discussion of this case, Reid claims that the adult can, but the child cannot, (a) distinguish the body of the cube from its surface, (b) see that the surface consists of six planes of the same figure and magnitude, (c) see that each of the planes has four equal sides and four equal angles and that

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the opposite sides of each plane, and the opposite planes are parallel. What accounts for this difference? Reid avers it is the presence and working of the faculty of judgment in the adult. But what does Reid take ‘judgment’ to be? Here is what he says about it:

The clear and accurate notions which geometry presents to us of a point, an angle, a square, a circle, of ratios direct and inverse, and others of that kind, can find no admittance into a mind that has not some degree of judgment. They are not properly ideas of the senses, nor are they got by compounding ideas of the senses; but by analyzing the ideas or notions we get by the senses into their simplest elements, and again combining these elements into various, accurate, and elegant forms, which the senses never did nor can exhibit. (EIP, 419)

‘Judgment’ here is the ability to analyze gross and indistinct notions into their simplest elements, as well as the ability to combine these simple elements again so as to form a complex but distinct notion of what was only indistinct before.

Reid thinks that the capacity to analyze gross and indistinct notions is not the work of any of our five senses. This capacity requires the ability to reflect, recollect and judge of what we were conscious of and distinctly remember. But reflection is not present in the mind of young children: ‘Of all the powers of the mind, it seems to be of the latest growth, whereas consciousness is coeval with the earliest’ (EIP, 345) Without this ability, the notions that are formed through sense perception or our consciousness, are gross and indistinct. Therefore, unlike the adult, the young child does not have an accurate notion of the cube because he cannot analyze the indistinct cube into its simple elements, and then put it back together into a whole. The child does not conceive the distinct elements of the cube, nor in what order they must be put together. Reid compares these indistinct and gross notions that infants have, to those of an adult who is hindered by a strong emotion or passion. His example is a man that panics because he thinks he sees a ghost. The panic prevents the man from forming a distinct notion of what his senses present to him. A strong emotion or passion, then, can impair judgment. (EIP, 344)

The capacity for judgment is required not only for obtaining accurate notions of the objects we perceive, but also for obtaining a notion of relations: ‘without judgment, we cannot have any notion of relations’ (EIP, 346) It follows that young children whose faculty of judgment is still asleep, cannot
have notions of relations: ‘it may be a question, whether infants, in the first period of life, have any judgment or belief at all’ \textit{(EIP, 409)}

If a child in later years begins to have notions of relations, or begins to analyze indistinct notions into their simple elements and put them together into wholes, we must conclude that the power of judgment must have been kissed awake. Adults can temporarily become like little children, however, when they are blinded by strong passions or emotions that impair their faculty of judgment. When this happens, the adult sees things confused and, according to Reid, probably much in the same manner as infants do before the use of judgment.

What can be said, from Reid’s perspective, about Lipman’s ideas about education in judgments? Well, Reid thinks that judgment involves analyzing indistinct notions into their simple elements and putting them back together into wholes as well as having notions of relations. As we saw, Reid claims that the intellectual powers are ‘… greatly improved by being used’ \textit{(EIP, 59)}. Therefore, from Reid’s perspective, it would be useful to practice with children the art of making judgments such as judgments of identity, similarity and difference, inference, composition and relevance. It will improve their overall power of judgment.

\textbf{Children and the Capacity of Reason}

Lipman’s method of practicing philosophy with children aims to improve cognitive skills such as reasoning skills. One way to practice reasoning skills during a philosophy for children session is to ask the child to provide a reason for a given statement.\textsuperscript{10} Lipman claims that stimulation of the reasoning skills enhances children’s trust in their own intellectual capacities. Educating children in reasoning, then, enables them to think for themselves.\textsuperscript{11} Reid, however, seems to think very differently about reasoning and children.

He asserts that children are capable of performing all sorts of intellectual operations, before they are capable of reasoning, where reasoning is the ‘operation […] in which, from two or more judgments, we draw a conclusion’ \textit{(EIP, 66)}. Some examples that Reid mentions are: infants can perceive things, remember things, be conscious of things; they furthermore can ask questions

\textsuperscript{10} Lipman, \textit{Thinking in Education}, 102.

and bear and receive testimony. They can do these things, Reid claims, ‘before they are capable of reasoning’ (EIP, 69).

This claim involves two theses. First, that doing any of these things does not involve reasoning; after all, if perception, memory, being conscious and so on were to involve reasoning, infants, incapable of reasoning, could not perceive, remember or be conscious of anything. Second, the claim involves the thesis that, seen from a developmental perspective, the capacities to perceive, remember, being conscious and so on can be exercised even at a time when the capacity for reasoning cannot yet be exercised. Reid, then, claims that

- [a] the capacities of perception, memory, be conscious etc. can be exercised independently of the exercise of the capacity of reasoning,
- [b] the capacities of perception, memory, be conscious etc. can be exercised before the capacity of reason can be exercised.

The logical relations between [a] and [b] should be noted. If [a] is false, then it follows that [b] is false too. But if [a] is true, then nothing follows as to the truth value of [b]. If [b] is false, nothing follows as to the truth value of [a]. And finally, if [b] is true, again nothing follows as to the truth value of [a].

Thesis [b] is rather obviously of an empirical nature and hence whether or not it is true cannot be decided from the philosophical armchair. Reid held it to be true—perhaps on the empirical basis of watching the development of his own eight children. Thesis [a] however is, perhaps less obviously, not of an empirical nature. But whether it is true seems to be decidable from the philosophical armchair. It is reflection that enables us to see that to perceive, remember or be conscious of something typically does not involve drawing conclusions from premises. Seeing a cow is not to infer there is a cow. Remembering that you had bread for breakfast this morning is not inferring that you had. Being conscious of a headache is not inferring that one has a headache.

So Reid’s first claim, then sounds eminently plausible—infants can and do perform intellectual operations independent from engagement in reasoning. To this he adds that this is a very good thing, for ‘in the first part of life, reason would do us much more hurt than good’ (EIP, 248). His argument is this:

Were we sensible of our condition in that period, and capable of reflecting upon it, we should be like a man in the dark, surrounded with dangers, where every step he takes may be into a pit. Reason would direct him to sit down, and wait till he could see about him. In like manner, if we suppose an infant endowed with reason, it would direct him to do
nothing, till he knew what could be done with safety. This he can only know by experiment, and experiments are dangerous. Reason directs, that experiments that are full of danger should not be made without a very urgent cause. It would therefore make the infant unhappy, and hinder his improvement by experience. Nature has followed another plan. The child, inapprehensive of danger, is led by instinct to exert all his active powers, to try everything without the cautious admonitions of reason, and to believe everything that is told him. Sometimes he suffers by his rashness what reason would have prevented: But this suffering proves a salutary discipline, and makes him in the future avoid the cause of it. Sometimes he is imposed upon by his credulity; but it is of infinite benefit to him upon the whole. His activity and credulity are more useful qualities, and better instructors than reason would be; they teach him more in a day than reason would do in a year; they furnish a stock of materials for reason to work upon; they make him easy and happy in a period of his existence, when reason could only serve to suggest a thousand tormenting anxieties and fears: And he acts agreeable to the constitution and intention of Nature, even when he does and believes what reason would not justify. So that the wisdom and goodness of the Author of Nature is no less conspicuous in withholding the exercise of our reason in this period, than inbestowing it when we are ripe for it. (EIP, 248–9)

In this passage ‘reason’ denotes not quite the capacity of reasoning, that is the capacity to draw conclusions from premises. Rather, it denotes the capacity to reflect and to deliberate, that is the capacity of having reasons for what one does and believes.

Reid holds that it is a very good thing that infants do not and cannot exercise their capacity to reflect and deliberate, and that they do and believe things in the absence of reasons. It is a very good thing, that is, that they do and believe things instinctively. And why is that? Let us first deal with acting instinctively.

12 In another passage Reid again states that ‘we should believe many things before we can reason’. The question he then poses is how belief is to be regulated if we have no reasons. Is it to be regulated by chance? ‘By no means’, says Reid, ‘It is regulated by certain principles, which are parts of our constitution; whether they ought to be called animal principles, or instinctive principles … is of small moment; but they are certainly different from the faculty of reason: They do the office of reason while it is in its infancy, and must as it were be carried in a nurse’s arms, and they are leading strings to it in its gradual progress’ (EIP, 239).
Reid’s view can be stated as follows: suppose infants were endowed with reason, that is, with the capacity to have reasons for actions—where ‘reasons’ should be thought of as considerations in the light of which one acts, in other words considerations that persuade one to do this thing and not another. Suppose furthermore that infants could exercise that capacity. Suppose finally that infants would only act for reasons. Then, Reid alleges, infants would sit still, do nothing and as a result perish and die. Why? Because reason directs us (and them) not to act until we know it is safe to act. Reason directs us, for example, not to dive in the river until we know it is safe to dive there. Accordingly, reason would direct rational infants not to drink their mother’s milk until they know it would not poison them, nor let their mothers hold them until they know she will not drop them. But how can an infant know such things? Only through experiments. But experiments are dangerous. And reason dictates that we do not do something unless it is safe to do so. But infants do not know these things are safe, and so reason directs them not to drink and not let their mothers hold them. But of course infants should do these things—their well-being depends on them! The conclusion is that it is therefore a very good thing that infants cannot exercise the capacity of reason. Reason only serves one aright when one has enough material (experience) for reason to work on.

Not only doing things by instinct is good, but believing by instinct is equally so. To believe things instinctively is to believe without having reasons in favor of them. Children believe by instinct. For example, they just believe what they are told. They ‘believe a thousand things before they ever spend a thought on evidence. Nature supplies the want of evidence, and gives them an instinctive kind of faith without evidence. They believe implicitly whatever they are told, and receive with assurance the testimony of every one, without ever thinking of a reason why they should do so’ (EIP, 86–7) Now why is it good for children to believe instinctively? Because in this way they learn much more than they would have if they only believed when they had reasons for it.

Instinctive action, and instinctive belief, then, Reid holds, are good things. Much good would be lost were reasons to be the only grounds for them. Does this mean that from Reid’s perspective Lipman’s method of doing philosophy with children in such a way that they provide reasons for statements they put forward is wrong? This question has no unequivocal answer. On the one hand, Reid clearly values autonomy and being capable of thinking for oneself—and he thinks it is valuable to learn how to do this. In another context Reid says, ‘You’ll be able to judge for yourself on many important points, while others
must blindly follow a leader’ (*EIP*, 59), thereby clearly indicating how highly he values autonomy. On the other hand, Reid is a foundationalist of sorts. We will not go into this in any detail, but single out one element of foundationalism that is pertinent to our topic. Foundationalists distinguish between beliefs that are foundational and beliefs that are not. Foundational beliefs are beliefs that one holds, and some of them properly so, says the foundationalist, in the absence of reasons. The foundationalist holds that at a certain point believing something for a reason comes to an end. You may believe that killing is wrong, but once you start wondering for what reason you believe that, you will soon run out of reasons. Many of our beliefs are, to use Alvin Plantinga’s terminology, ‘properly basic’.\(^\text{13}\) If Reid is correct, and many of our beliefs are properly basic, that is, not held on the basis of reasons, then this can throw cold water on Lipman’s exercise in the philosophy for children classroom. For then children shall easily and quickly be silenced, as they cannot give reasons for every assertion that they put forward. And this is nothing special for children. The same is true for adults.

From this we may hypothesize the following: in doing philosophy with children, the requirement of providing reasons for every statement a child puts forward, will soon lead to uneasiness and a feeling of bafflement on the part of the children. The requirement directs the discussion in wrong directions. Our claim can be empirically verified, of course. All that it takes is a class of children and a teacher that strictly applies the rule that for every statement that a child puts forward, s/he provides a reason. But there is a quicker and less laborious way to get the same result—by thought experiment. Just imagine two children A and B who have a conversation while Lipman’s rule is applied. Suppose A puts forward claim p. Then B may ask for A’s reason for p. Suppose A produces reason q. Then B, of course, can repeat the question and ask for A’s reason for q. Suppose A produces reason r. Then B, of course, can ask again, and so forth. If this discussion is going to lead anywhere, A or B will have to revert to a statement for which they can produce no further reasons. And this establishes the point that a systematic enforcement of Lipman’s rule, will wreak havoc in the classroom, and perhaps also in tender minds. Fiachra Long comes to a similar conclusion.\(^\text{14}\) He claims that, when it comes to philosophy for children, Reid’s common sense approach in philosophy is more suitable

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\(^{13}\) Alvin Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds), *Faith and Rationality. Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, 1983).

than the sceptical approach that he associates with Descartes. If we follow Reid, we should protect rather than challenge the naïveté of children.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, then, this paper discusses the relevance of Reid’s philosophical thoughts about children for doing philosophy with children. If Reid’s thoughts are on target, we should expect all of the following:

1. By having children work with teaching materials that stimulate them to think about the notion of existence, they will thereby further the development of their perceptual capacity.
2. Repeating what has been said by others before responding to it, will help children to develop regular trains of thought.
3. Exercises that help children to form specific judgments will enhance their overall capacity of judgment.
4. The effort to provide reasons for all that they put forward will do more harm than good in children.

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The thesis of this paper is that Reid’s moral theory validates the moral theories of other Scots such as Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith. I realize that there is disagreement amongst them. However it is in their agreement that I see an important commonality and contribution to moral theory. This Scottish commonality is that reason and sentiment combine in the forming of morality in a specific moral sense faculty and that there are universal moral agreements. All of these Scots included reason, sentiments and a moral faculty as central to morality.

I argue that Reid’s moral theory shares fundamental commonalities with Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith—commonalities that even Reid does not see. It is clear when reading Thomas Reid’s *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*[^1] that Reid intends to distance and differentiate himself specifically and deliberately from Hume’s moral theory. However, on a closer reading of Reid’s moral theory, one finds that the two Scots, along with Hutcheson and Smith, were in agreement in some specific, important, and surprising ways. This paper outlines those compatibilities between Reid and Hume, Hutcheson, and Smith and the importance of these agreements for contemporary moral theory. These commonalities are that moral judgments and evaluations include reason and sentiment and that these judgments are facilitated in a moral sense faculty. They also agree that there are universal moral agreements.

The first point of compatibility is the role of reason in moral formation, which is integral for all of them. Reid makes the distinction between one’s conscience and reason (*EAPM*, 222). What is ‘good upon the whole’ is reached using reason for Reid (*EAPM*, 205–6). This does not contradict Hume’s use of reason as informing the moral sense and therefore our sentiments. That Hume includes reason is counter to what Reid believed Hume to be doing. Reid’s language for reason’s role in respect to the passions is that of dominion while Hume presents it as a slave (perhaps an unfortunate image given the

[^1]: All references and page numbers to Thomas Reid’s *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* are taken from Baruch Brody’s volume (Boston, Mass, 1969); hereafter cited as *EAPM*. 
importance of reason in Hume’s account). Yet they are both, along with Hutcheson and Smith, committed to reason playing a central role in either informing (Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith) or informing and directing (Reid) our passions, or so it will be argued here.

Along with the use of reason, the involvement of sentiment and feeling to moral foundations also has similar treatments in Reid and Hume. While Reid calls ‘our duty and our real happiness … ends which are inseparable’ and pursued by every man (EAPM, 290), Hutcheson, Hume and Smith would describe them as the concern for the self, other, and societal interest and, therefore, sentiments common to humanity that motivate our moral choices and actions. Along these same lines of moral motivation, Reid writes that moral motivation is a factor in our constitution, one whose role is ‘to seek the good and avoid the ill’ (EAPM, 206). Reid also claims that moral determinations are made through a moral faculty, which ‘without impropriety [may] be called the moral sense’ (EAPM, 232). Reid compares this faculty to other senses such as sight and hearing and writes that the ‘truths immediately testified by our moral faculty, are the first principles of all moral reasoning’ (EAPM, 233). Though Reid frames his discussion in rationalist terms and rationalist language, what he is describing is in fact compatible with his fellow Scots, Hutcheson, Hume and Smith.

This paper will also add Reid’s references to and discussions of the ‘universal agreement of men’ (EAPM, 230), good upon the whole (EAPM, 205), and ‘what all men praise’ (EAPM, 223), as further indications that all of the Scots shared this idea of a universal morality and the concept of human moral agreement. In Hume this is called the common or general point of view and the universal or common moral sentiment. This last commonality of human moral agreement, along with the notion that the foundations of morality are founded in a combination of reason and sentiment and formed in a moral sense faculty, are all characteristics that could, or at least should, be of interest to contemporary moral and social theorists. These Scottish moral theorists’ compatibilities in the face of their distinct differences make them a model for the contemporary multicultural and multi-religious discussions on moral foundations. The four Scots do seem to reveal the possibility of agreement despite the apparent disagreements in their beliefs.

I begin with the role of reason. Reid frames the question of reason’s role in moral formation as one of surprise that there is even a dispute over the nature of our moral judgments. “The approbation of good actions, and disapprobation of bad, are so familiar to every man come to years of understanding, that it
seems strange there should be any dispute about their nature’ (EAPM, 457). Hume, too, in An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals,² writes that anyone who does not see that we make moral judgments cannot be taken seriously but ‘may be ranked among the disingenuous disputants’ (EPM, 1.2, 3). Hume continues by describing the two approaches to moral foundations, ‘whether they be derived from reason, or from sentiment’ (EPM, 1.3 3) Reid’s description of the dispute also draws an exacting line between the two camps.

[Yet, for a half a century, it has been a serious dispute among philosophers, what this approbation and disapprobation is, whether there be a real judgement included in it, which, like all other judgement, must be true or false; or, whether it include no more but some agreeable or uneasy feeling, in the person who approves or disapproves. (EAPM, 457)]

So, for Reid, the dispute is whether moral approval and disapproval involves reason or whether it is only the result of feelings. Reid is characterizing Hume as arguing that ‘moral approbation and disapprobation are not judgements, which must be true or false, but barely, agreeable and uneasy feelings or sensations’ (EAPM, 458). Reid asks if this is the case then ‘what is left to the cognitive part of our nature…? (458). Reid misses here that, though making moral sentiments important and the grounding to the foundations of morals, Hume also adds ‘that reason must enter for a considerable share in all decisions of this kind; since nothing but that faculty can instruct us in the tendency of qualities and actions…’ (EPM, App. 1.2, 83). So, for Hume, reason has a considerable share in what the moral faculty approves or disapproves of. This is not, as Reid has misinterpreted Hume as arguing, a statement that leaves cognition out of moral determination.

Reid also explains the importance of reason’s role in morality as his ‘rational principles of action in man’; and, for Reid, these principles have ‘no existence in beings not endowed with reason, and, in all their exertions, require, not only intention and will, but judgement or reason’ (EAPM, 200–1). ‘To act from these principles, is what has always been meant by acting according to reason (EAPM, 203). Reid continues, in arguing for the importance of reason in mankind. ‘That talent which we call reason…has…been conceived to have two offices, to regulate our belief, and to regulate our actions and

² References will be to Tom L. Beauchamp (ed.), David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (Oxford, 1998), hereafter cited as EPM.
conduct” (EAPM, 201). For Reid, ‘[w]hatever we believe, we think agreeable to reason, and on that account, yield our assent to it. Whatever we disbelieve, we think contrary to reason, and on that account, dissent from it. Reason therefore is allowed to be the principle by which our belief and opinions ought to be regulated’ (EAPM, 201). So Reid’s description of reason’s role as the regulator of morality is specific and important. Reid wonders how anyone could question this obvious role for reason. ‘That it is a part of the office of reason to determine, the proper means to any end which we desire, no man ever denied.’ Yet, he characterizes Hume as doing just that: ‘But some philosophers, particularly Mr. Hume, think that it is no part of the office of reason to determine the ends we ought to pursue, or the preference due to one end above another.’ Hume, according to Reid, does not think the job of determining ends pursued or preferring one end rather than another is ‘the office of reason, but of taste or feeling’ (EAPM, 202). Reid argues against Hume that ‘[i]f this be so, reason cannot, with any propriety, be called a principle of action. Its office can only be to minister to the principles of action, by discovering the means of their gratification. Accordingly Mr. Hume maintains, that reason is no principle of action; but that it is, and ought to be, the servant of the passions’ (EAPM, 202). Reid then, in his own words, ‘endeavor[s] to show, that, among the various ends of human actions, there are some, of which, without reason, we could not even form a conception; and that, as soon as they are conceived, a regard to them is, by our constitution, not only a principle of action, but a leading and governing principle to which all our animal principles are subordinate, and to which they ought to be subject’ (EAPM, 202). Here Reid is describing interplay between a regard to what we conceive and reason as a principle of action, and he includes regard and reason in how we make our decisions directing our animal passions. So Reid includes a feeling of regard in his principle of action. This represents a basic problem in Reid’s characterization of Hume’s moral formation from feeling. Reid categorizes Hume’s ‘feeling’ as animal passions whereas for Hume these feelings are experienced through the human moral sense faculty and are necessarily informed by reason.

Reid divides human ends into two categories ‘to wit what is good for us upon the whole, and what appears to be our duty. They are very strictly connected, lead to the same course of conduct, and cooperate with each other; and, on that account, have commonly been comprehended under one name, that of reason. But as they may be disjoined, and are really distinct principles of action, I shall consider them separately” (EAPM, 203). This is of interest
when finding his compatibility with Hume, as Reid divides what has been commonly been called reason into distinct principles of action. Especially so because Reid continues in a manner that is decisively empirical as he describes the process in which a rational being knows the ‘good upon the whole’ to involve experiences from the past and ‘what will probably happen in time to come’ \((EAPM, 205)\). He describes the moderating of our animal desires as we see ‘discoverable connections and consequences, bring [ing] more good than ill’ \((EAPM, 205)\). This process, as necessarily involving the ability to form conceptions of good and evil, then necessitates reason. He calls what is determined in this process ‘rational principle[s] of action’ \((EAPM, 206)\). Reid adds to this moral motivation, claiming we are to follow these concepts ‘of what is good or ill for us upon the whole… by our constitution, to seek the good and avoid the ill’ \((EAPM, 206)\). For Reid this becomes ‘a leading or governing principle to which all our animal principles ought to be subordinate’ \((EAPM, 206)\).

Reid’s reference to our constitution is another point of agreement with Hume. Reid explains that we seek the good as a part of our nature and not as a result of our reasoning processes. This becomes more evident in Reid’s self-evident principles that cannot be known through reason, as discussed further below.

Reid then describes various ways that feelings and judgment do not interact. But the most telling discussion is where he describes how feelings and judgment do work together in moral judgments. Reid explains that ‘in most of the operations of mind in which judgment or belief is combined with feeling, the feeling is the consequence of the judgement, and is regulated by it’ \((EAPM, 463)\). Or as Hume puts it reason ‘instructs us in the tendency of qualities and actions’ \((EPM, App. 1.2, p. 81)\). Reid continues, ‘Thus, an account of the good conduct of a friend at a distance gives me a very agreeable feeling, and a contrary account would give me a very uneasy feeling; but these feelings depend entirely upon my belief of the report’ \((EAPM, 463)\). Reid adds in this same description of interplay between feelings and reason that, ‘In the respect we bear to the worthy, and in our contempt of the worthless, there is both judgement and feeling, and the last [feelings] depends entirely upon the first’ \((EAPM, 463)\). Could this dependency of feeling on reason in Reid’s description of it, be equally well described in terms of dependency on a servant or slave?

For Reid, Hume is guilty of an abuse of words if he includes under the name ‘passions’ what for Reid has always been called ‘reason’. Actually Reid
Phyllis Vandenberg

accuses Hume of two possible abuses by putting moral determination as a function of the passions and by excluding reason from the determining of the ‘good upon the whole’ (EAPM, 208). Reid understandably uses Hume’s statement ‘that reason is, and ought to be, the servant of the passions’ (EAPM, 208) to support a claim of abuse of words. I would like to discuss this unfortunately misunderstood phrase from Hume, notably dropped and not to be found in Hume’s Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. The phrase from Hume’s Treatise itself is inflammatory as, I believe, a youthful Hume desired it to be, and yet, it does describe exactly what Hume wants it to as regards the foundations of morality. Perhaps Hume can be read here as moving reason to a subservient role or as putting reason in a secondary place. The use of the word ‘servant’ or ‘slave’ is purposeful for Hume believes that reason informs and serves and understands (forming concepts in response to) the passions. The passions that direct one’s actions are, in fact, those informed by one’s reason. Perhaps Reid is correct in thinking that without reason the passions are those of brute animals. But, for Hume, the moral passions or feelings are specific to the moral sense, not just any feelings; and those moral sense feelings are served by our reason both by input, which Reid describes as discovering connections, and by those consequences that bring more good than ill, which he calls ‘good upon the whole’ (EAPM, 205). Now the concept that reason is a servant/slave is unfortunate because Hume describes an important and necessary role for reason. I believe he overstated it, however, to impress the idea that feelings, well informed in the sense of a rational person, motivate and are the way we ‘feel’ moral approbation and disapprobation from the moral sense. For Hume, unless I care about others all the good rational and empirical arguments that a certain action will hurt someone—or, indeed, many—does not and cannot affect my practical reasoned action. Under all reasoning and action for Hume there needs to be a desire/passion—a motivating principle. Interestingly, Reid may be referring to just this when he writes that ‘we are led by our constitution to seek the good and avoid the ill’ (EAPM, 206), since for Reid this is a principle of action to which all our animal principles ought to be subordinate” (EAPM, 206).

Reid also includes sentiment when he describes the observation of a man ‘exerting himself nobly in a good cause … ’ Reid writes, ‘I look up to his virtue, I approve, I admit it … I have pleasure indeed, or an agreeable feeling … This is affection; it is love and esteem, which is more than mere feeling’ (EAPM, 263). This again is Reid affirming the presence of feeling as an integral part of moral analysis. He, of course, does not see that this is not in opposition
Reid and Hume in Agreement on Moral Foundations

to Hume’s own interplay of feelings and reason. Equally, in his discussion of honour, Reid speaks of it as not including a blush, ‘[n]o man would allow him to be a man of honour, who should plead his interest to justify what he acknowledged to be dishonourable; but to sacrifice interest to honour never costs a blush’ (*EAPM*, 224). This seemingly and perhaps actually insignificant reference Reid makes to one’s not blushing when choosing honor over self-interest may be similar to the breast test which is Hume’s suggestion for how to find a moral attitude. Hume claims that one need only enter one’s own breast for a moment and choose those attributes you would want attributed to you to find what is morally good, and what you would not want attributed to you as morally bad (*EPM*, 1.10, 6). For Reid the moral thing would be what would not cost a blush. In other words we would not feel an embarrassment from the action. And for Hume we would want the action to be attributed to us. For Joseph Butler, moral actions are those ‘every man you meet, puts on a show of . . .’ (Butler, 379). In other words for Reid, Hume and Butler the moral actions are those we are proud of and those characteristics we want to be thought of having.

Reid describes affections and feelings as parts of the human constitution that indicate moral judgment of right and wrong. Reid expresses it this way: ‘[t]he natural affections of respect to worthy characters, of resentment of injuries, of gratitude for favors, of indignation against the worthless, are parts of the human constitution which suppose a right and a wrong in conduct’ (*EAPM*, 225). For Reid, a regard to duty is what makes one virtuous, not a Kantian intent or commitment to duty and rationality. Reid’s motivation necessitates a feeling of regard. For Reid, ‘[a] man is prudent when he consults his real interest, but he cannot be virtuous, if he has no regard to duty. I proceed now to consider this regard to duty as a rational principle of action in man, and as that principle alone by which he is capable either of virtue or vice’ (*EAPM*, 223). Reid adds that, ‘I presume it will be granted, that in every man of real worth, there is a principle of honour, a regard to what is honourable or dishonourable, very distinct from a regard to his interest’ (*EAPM*, 224). In these statements Reid is referring to the necessity of having a regard, in the first case to duty, in the second to what is honorable or dishonorable. This regard again in both cases is distinct from self-interest for Reid. The regard to duty is the rational principle of action. Is there any other way to consider this

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use of *regard* than as a feeling of esteem or respect? In other words, for Reid, one has to have a feeling of regard towards duty and what is honorable in order to be virtuous. This is similar to what Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith also claim. Reason does not work alone to motivate or to make moral judgments. A feeling has to be there, not in the sense of animal passions, as Reid would like to reduce Hume’s passions to, but in the sense of well-informed human passions, and not just any passion, but the special kind of sentiment felt in the moral sense faculty. In this way moral feelings move and reason informs the moral sentiments of approval and disapproval. Reid, again, discusses this involvement of feelings in motivation. “In the approbation of a good action, therefore, there is a feeling, indeed, but there is also esteem of the agent; and both feeling and the esteem depend upon the judgment we form of his conduct.” (*EAPM*, 349). Here judgment and feeling are involved in moral motivation. Reid is in fact much more like Hume on moral motivation than Reid seems to realize he is. I am not claiming that the way Reid’s reason and sentiment interact to form moral foundations is exactly the same as Hume’s, but they both describe a complex interplay that Reid’s account of Hume fails to acknowledge. However, it is clear that, for both, reason and sentiment are integral to the formation of morality.

All of the Scots had an account of a moral faculty which involved reason and feeling in producing moral sentiments. Reid explains it this way, ‘[w]hen I exercise my moral faculty about my own actions or those of other men, I am conscious that I judge as well as feel’ (*EAPM*, 464). Reid continues further that, ‘… men judge … of virtue and vice by their moral faculty’ (*EAPM*, 467). Reid sees and discusses his agreement with Hume that “the moral sense therefore is the power of judging in morals” (*EAPM*, 468). Reid though believes he differs from Hume because again Reid interprets Hume to have ‘the moral sense to be only a power of feeling, without judging …” (468). It is for Reid an abuse of the word, *sense*, not to include reason (*EAPM*, 468). Reid continues that ‘authors who place moral approbation in feeling only, very often use the word *sentiment*, to express feeling without judgement … the word *sentiment*, in the English language, never, as I conceive, signifies mere feeling, but judgement accompanied with feeling’ (*EAPM*, 468–9). Here again Reid is missing the fact that Hume’s sentiment as felt in the moral sense faculty does involve reason, and that they are therefore in agreement.

Reid argues that ‘… our moral faculty . . [has] both the original conceptions of right and wrong in conduct, of merit and demerit, and the original judgements that this conduct is right, that is wrong; that this character has
worth, that, demerit. The testimony of our moral faculty, like that of the external senses, is the testimony of nature, and we have the same reason to rely upon it. The truths immediately testified by our moral faculty, are the first principles of all moral reasoning, from which all our knowledge of our duty must be deduced (EAPM, 233). In this passage Reid declares the self-evident nature of the truths as known by his moral sense faculty. That the moral faculty is where moral evaluations come from is in exact agreement with his fellow Scots.

That there is a moral faculty in all men, and its universal implications, is equally clear in Reid. “[T]he names of the virtues which it [the moral faculty] commands, and of the vices which it forbids … expresses its dictates … [and is] an essential part of every language. The natural affections of respect to worthy characters, of resentment of injuries, of gratitude for favors, of indignation against the worthless, are parts of the human constitution which suppose a right and wrong in conduct” (EAPM, 225). Again, in speaking of the moral faculty, Reid is pointing to human commonalities. ‘Many transactions that are found necessary in the rudest societies … there is necessarily implied a moral obligation on one party, and a trust in the other …’ He adds that the ‘variety of opinions among men in points of morality [are] much less than in speculative points …’ (EAPM, 225–6). Reid finds specific common principles that are the basis for a whole moral system and ‘that every man of common understanding, who wishes to know his duty, may know it [the system of moral conduct]’ (EAPM, 370).

There is nothing in the other Scots that parallels Reid’s first principles, however. These seem to be unique to Reid’s theory of moral foundation and integral to the forming of morality for Reid. ‘All reasoning must be grounded on first principles’. In all reasoning there are first principles and “[t]here must therefore be in morals, as in all other sciences, first or self-evident principles, on which all moral reasoning is grounded, and on which it ultimately rests’. It is from these ‘self-evident principles [that] conclusions may be drawn synthetically with regard to the moral conduct of life …’ Reid argues that our ‘particular duties or virtues [can] be traced back to such principles, analytically’. And in a dramatic way Reid claims that ‘without such principles, we can no more establish any conclusion in morals, than we can build a castle in the air, without any foundation’ (EAPM, 234). So reasoning, for Reid, is inert without first principles and without feelings of regard. Thus for Reid, “[t]he first principles of morals are not deductions. They are self-evident; and their truth, like that of other axioms, is perceived
without reasoning or deductions. And moral truths that are not self-evident are deduced, not from relations quite different from them, but from the first principles of morals” (*EAPM*, 471). Initially, it might appear that Reid means that these truths themselves were implanted, that we were born with them, given to us by God. And, yet, Reid speaks of what God implants as ‘the faculty of perceiving the right and the wrong in conduct’ (*EAPM*, 481). Reid explains this as a seed implanted by God, not as an already formed set of principles. Rather, ‘our moral judgment or conscience grows to maturity from an imperceptible seed, planted by our creator’ (*EAPM*, 369). This faculty which starts as a seed, of course, for Reid as well as Hume, is the moral faculty in which our moral sentiments of approval and disapproval are formed and felt. So it is in the moral faculty that the first principles of morality are known. Reid makes the case that the first principles are those that all thoughtful mature persons would agree to. Reid adds that from these first principles ‘the whole system of moral conduct follows so easily, and with so little aid of reasoning, that every man of common understanding, who wishes to know his duty, may know it’ (*EAPM*, 370). That every person comes to know them is significant, as they are not, for Reid, innate nor accessed or formed using reason.

For Reid, then, we come to know the first principles as we have experiences and grow to maturity. Reid states that ‘[w]hen we are capable of contemplating the actions of other men, or of reflecting upon our own calmly and dispassionately, we begin to perceive in them the qualities of honest and dishonest, of honourable and base, of right and wrong, and to feel the sentiments of moral approbation and disapprobation’ (*EAPM*, 369). For Reid, therefore, the foundation of morality is, as it is for Hume, to be found in the moral sense; and it starts there, not from reasoning, but from self-evident principles that we know from our interactions and observations of others. Morality is a result of human experience, formed using the God-given moral sense faculty. The self-evident truths formed in our moral sense faculty are, for Reid, quite distinct from anything in Hume’s moral theory and yet the fact that there is no innate content to the moral sense—that it starts as an empirical blank slate—is in complete agreement with Hume.

Another of Reid’s specific points that differs from the other Scots is his claim that social interaction is part of human nature, ‘[t]he social operations to be as simple in their [human] nature as the solitary. They are found in every individual of the species, even before the use of reason’ (*EAPM*, 239). And then again,
The power which man has of holding social intercourse with his kind, by asking and refusing, threatening and supplicating, commanding and obeying, testifying and promising, must either be a distinct faculty given by our Maker, and a part of our constitution, like the power of seeing, and hearing, or it must be a human invention… I think it is likewise evident, that this intercourse, in its beginning at least, must be carried on by natural signs, whose meaning is understood by both parties, previous to all compacts or agreement. (EAPM, 439)

Reid argues, then, that social interaction is not a human convention: it must be a natural tendency since it is found in and understood by everyone. For Hume and the other sentimentalists, social interaction is also both basic and necessary for moral formation. However, this human propensity is not born but is developed quickly after birth and then forms part of human healthy development. I do not think it important whether it is an innate tendency or whether this social need and concern is developed soon after birth. All of the Scots, Reid included, did see, not that we should care about others and society, but that we naturally do.

This regard for society and need for social interaction play significant roles in what our moral faculty responds to in its development of morality and what is approved of and disapproved of. Hume called it utility, that we approve of what is good for society and disapprove of what is harmful. Hume argues that ‘no qualities are more entitled to the general good-will and approbation of mankind, than benevolence and humanity… natural affection and public spirit … a generous concern for our kind and species’ (EPM, II.I.5, 9) Reid, also, includes in his discussion of the self-evident truths that human kind ‘when uncorrupted by vicious habits, and under the government of the leading principles of reason and conscience, are excellently fitted for the rational and social life (EAPM, 364). And Reid, again, as part of what we come to realize as self-evident says, that “[n]o man is born for himself only. Every man, therefore, ought to consider himself as a member of the common society of mankind… To do as much good as he can, and as little hurt to the societies of which he is a part (EAPM, 365). This is another point in his agreement with Hume.

According Reid a more prominent role in modern era morality, as Terence Cuneo and René Van Woudenberg argue in their introduction to The Cambridge Companion to Reid, would underline also the importance of what he, Hutcheson, Hume and Smith realized, and which has been disregarded by
those adopting a Kantian approach. The Kantian approach took humanity as feeling rational beings out of the moral equation mostly because of Kant’s suspicion of inclinations which he—incorrectly—assumed shaped Hume’s moral feelings. There is no murky area for Kant. Morality is about duty to one’s rationality and treating everyone with that same respect. For the Scots, including Reid, humans have not only the power of rationality; they also have regard for others and for society or for the good upon the whole as Reid puts it. These are not inclinations and/or feelings that should be suspect but, rather, are valuable qualities that are an integral part of moral foundations. These are the attributes that also cross cultural lines. The ability to care about others and our action in the midst of others sets humans apart from animals just as much as rationality does. When looking for commonality in practice or when trying to find common ground between peoples a rational argument needs to be accompanied by an appeal to our human commonality of regard towards others and for our own self-regard. Not seeing this murky complexity at the heart of moral foundations is to miss a commonality from which moral conversations can begin.

Also, it seems to me, the Scots, including Reid, were describing a complex and, yet, clearly understandable process, not of how humans should form moral judgments, but that they do form morality in their moral faculty using reason and sentiment. This again is of potential significance to contemporary moral theorists if their goal is to find commonality across cultures and religions. Without understanding the complexity that the Scots describe, moral discussions and language can involve the overlay of rules, albeit reasonable ones, rather than the developing of a more informed and inclusive moral system. Taking the Scots seriously in moral formation means to acknowledge and allow into our understanding of moral development a complexity of reason and sentiment. It also means realizing that human commonality in moral formulation is there whether it is obvious or not, and needs to be identified in every moral dispute.

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In this paper I begin, in part one, by showing that Reid’s position in Natural Theology is one that is confronted by the problem of evil. In particular we note and consider his adherence to the teaching that God made the world. We then move to consider in part two how Reid categorises the evils to be found in this world, in particular noting that he accepts a division of evils into those of imperfection, natural evils and moral evils. Finally in part three we consider his responses to the problem posed by the existence of these varieties of evil, the problem of evil itself. In particular we consider his case for rejecting Leibniz’s doctrine that this is the best of all possible worlds as an aid towards a resolution of that problem.

It will be clear that my principal text for the purpose of this paper is Elmer H. Duncan’s *Thomas Reid’s Lectures on Natural Theology (1780).* This is a transcription from contemporary student notes with all the risks and difficulties that such an enterprise involves. The lectures which are the basis of the text are lectures 73 to 87 of a series delivered by Reid in 1780, and throughout the paper I shall refer to the individual lectures by this numbering. I shall also, when referring to specific pages of Duncan’s transcription use expressions such as ‘D, 38’ for page 38 of the lectures in his transcription.

We shall, of course, not be neglecting Essay IV, chapter xi of *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* in Hamilton’s seventh edition of Reid’s works entitled ‘Of the Permission of Evil’. We shall need to consult the passage from Essay VI, chapter VI of *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* concerning the principle that design and intelligence in the cause, may be inferred, with certainty, from marks or signs of it in the effect. Not to mention one or two items in Reid’s

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1 Elmer H. Duncan (ed.), *Thomas Reid’s Lectures On Natural Theology (1780), Transcribed from Student Notes* (Washington DC, 1981), cited hereafter in the text as D.
correspondence. And we shall be inviting consideration of a passage from Leibniz’s *Discourse on Metaphysics*.5

Reid and the problem of evil

Lecture 81 makes it clear that, for Reid, God has unlimited power (*D*, 71), unlimited perfection (*D*, 73), and perfect knowledge and wisdom (*D*, 74). In lecture 82 Reid maintains that God has a perfect moral character, including (*D*, 86), goodness and forbearance, truth and veracity, love of and to virtue and dislike to vice, justice and equity in the administration of things, and, of course, mercy. It will be seen that Reid’s adherence to this position on God’s moral character plays a fundamental role in his discussion of the problem of evil. Lecture 81 also makes it clear that for Reid God made and sustains the world. He laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens (*D*, 70). The regular, constant and uniform laws of nature not only display his goodness and wisdom but require also his constant operation and therefore require his presence in all parts of duration (*D*, 70). He has made matter which we can neither produce nor annihilate (*D*, 72).

What is more, throughout these lectures Reid, on the basis of what he calls the marks of design to be found in creatures and the creation, insists that God designed creatures. And it must surely be admitted that the position that God made the world and the creatures in it in a fulsome sense can hardly be sustained unless this is so. As Reid maintains (*D*, 15), every new discovery brings new evidence of the most excellent contrivance in the construction of things. We see these excellences exhibited in the planetary system, and in the construction of human and animal bodies and plants, to instance some of Reid’s favourite sources of marks of design in the creation. Now we know that Reid wanted to go farther and ‘to argue the existence of a first cause or of a deity … from the appearance of wisdom and design which we see in the creation and in the Universe’ (*D*, 15). The marks of design in creatures should enable us ‘to infer that they were at first produced and still are governed by a wise and intelligent cause’ (*D*, 15). But here perhaps lies a trap. For to argue from marks of design to some designer would seem to be circular, given that ‘marks of design’ means features of actual designs.

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4 Paul Wood (ed.), *The Correspondence of Thomas Reid* (Edinburgh, 2002).
But it is clear enough that Reid thinks that the world is full of marks or hints of design. How can he be entitled to hold this position? To get some help with this matter we must turn to Reid’s letters to Kames and, in particular, to that of December 16, 1780. In Wood’s edition of Reid’s *Correspondence* we read:

Efficient causes properly so called are not within the Sphere of natural Philosophy. Its business is, from particular facts in the material World, to collect by just Induction the Laws that are less general, and from these the more general as far as we can go. And when this done, natural Philosophy has no more to do. It exhibits to our view the grand machine of the material World, analysed as it were, and taken to pieces; with the connections and dependencies of its several parts, and the Laws of its several Movements. It belongs to another branch of Philosophy to consider whether this machine is the work of Chance or of design, & whether of good or of bad Design; Whether there is not an intelligent first mover who contrived the Whole, and gives Motion to the whole, according to the laws which the natural Philosopher has discovered …

And again:

As to final Causes, they stare us in the face wherever we cast our Eyes. I can no more doubt whether the Eye was made for the purpose of seeing, & the Ear of hearing, than I can doubt of a Mathematical Axiom. Yet the Evidence is neither Mathematical Demonstration nor is it Induction. In a word, final Causes, good final Causes, are seen plainly every where; in the Heavens and in the Earth, in the constitution of every animal, and in our own constitution of body and of Mind.

Finally, in Wood’s edition of Reid’s *Correspondence*, we are given the following:

As to Efficient Causes, I am afraid, our Faculties carry us but a very little way and almost only to general Conclusions. I hold it to be selfevident that every production and every change in Nature must have an Efficient Cause, that has power to produce the Effect. And that an Effect which has the most manifest marks of Intelligence, Wisdom

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6 *Correspondence*, 142.
7 Ibid.
and Goodness, must have an intelligent, wise and good Efficient Cause. … We are led by Nature to believe ourselves to be the Efficient Causes of our own voluntary actions, and from Analogy we judge the same of other intelligent beings.⁸

From the above it would seem we could safely conclude that the knowledge or belief that something in nature was designed does not, as far as Reid is concerned, come from Induction, from the application of the principles of scientific investigation. Nevertheless a belief that something is designed can clearly be well founded as far as he is concerned.

This leads me to some reflection on an apparent threat to the position that God made and designed creatures posed by the Darwinian theory of evolution. We could begin by considering some remarks Reid makes in lecture 85 (D, 106), on positions related to Darwin’s:

Many attempts have been made to explain the present appearances of things, of mountains, valleys, minerals, etc. different strata & layers of earths, these extraneous bodies, animal and vegetable found at great depths in the Earth & so on. Many ingenious authors have exercised their art to invent a hypothesis to solve all these appearances. According[ly] we find some attributing all to the universal Deluge, in which everything was displaced torn up and tost about & hence that mixture of marine bodies on the top of mountains & so on which is to be found. … Such are some of the conjectures about these appearances & what do they amount to? They are only the dreams of speculative men.

So if Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection should be classed among such speculations it is clear that, as far as Reid is concerned, it would pose no threat to the position that God designed creatures. There would not be a direct conflict in this case between two different equally well attested views. But there is surely more to be said. What if that theory were the product of careful experiments and induction? What if it were as well attested as the Newtonian Law of gravity and as other principles of Newtonian mechanics were thought to be by Reid? What if it were the true theory behind the history of the emergence of species, a formulation that can be found sometimes in Reid’s exposition, as, for instance, in ‘Essays on the Intellectual Powers of

⁸ Ibid., 143.
Man’ (VI, 6, 509). Newton’s principles give us ‘the true system of the sun, moon, and planets’, why not an equivalent for the organic world?

Well, Reid might try resorting to what he says towards the end of Lecture 79 (D, 58), in reply to such possibilities:

A law of nature never could produce anything without an intelligent being to put them in execution. As in civil law it is not the law which tries a man, but the judge acting according to those laws and executing them… In like manner a law of Nature presupposes a Lawgiver, a being who established and operates according to them. We see then it is vain to have recourse to this Subterfuge to say that all was produced by Nature.

Clearly the comparison of laws of nature to laws of a legal system is not without its difficulties, but someone who takes Reid’s position here, notwithstanding those difficulties, seems to be exposed to the further objection that such a position differs very little, if at all, from the position that God set initial conditions and the rest of history, including the emergence of the planetary system, plant life, animals and mankind, followed in accordance with the laws of nature God prescribed, no further divine activity being required. Now this last view is at least similar to one for which Reid displays considerable discomfort. Thus in lecture 86 (D, 112) we find:

According to the theory of Leibniz the world was so made as to need no operation of the Deity for its government; that every thing had such power implanted in it at its first constitution that [would] produce all subsequent changes without any interposition of the Supreme Being & therefore he considered every interposition of the Deity as a miracle. This is a theory which had many admirers but seems to have no foundation in truth or in reason.

Reid continues:

It may be observed, that he differs from the common meaning affixed to the word miracle. It is not every interposition of Deity that constitutes an action miraculous; it is only actions done in express violation of the usual fixed laws of Nature in order to attest a divine omniscience [omnipotence?]. Thus the raising from the dead [of] a man who has
been four days in his grave & what [whose?] body is become putrid by a single word, this is a miracle as it is contrary to the Laws of Nature. But that every interposition of Deity is a miracle cannot be admitted.

And now Reid continues this passage in the way we would expect given what he said above:

We see indeed that the world is governed by general laws, but do not laws require an agent to execute them & to produce effects according to them. Laws are not agents, they are only rules according to which an agent operates …

And he also adds \(D, 113\):

Why should it be thought unworthy of Deity to preserve by his care, these natures he formed at first by his power? Indeed, it is unsuitable to the principles of Philosophy or the Sacred Scripture which everywhere represents him as the kind preserver of all his work.

Against this last point is an argument Reid attributes to Leibniz \(D, 112\):

If … a workman should make a clock that perpetually goes on of itself without needing any future interposition, any mending or reparation this surely would be a more perfect machine than the one that required the hand of the artificer to be continually employed in regulating its motions & preventing it from going wrong. Now all the works of God are surely perfect, the Universe then being the work of God must be perfect & therefore need no future interposition of the power to direct or support it.

Reid argues against this position \(D, 113\), but note that he does not invoke the point that creatures are, in some sense, not perfect. He argues instead that of any such workman all that can be said is:

All that he does is only to apply certain powers, but it is nature & not him that confers these powers.

And so, between this workman and the Deity, ‘there is no similitude, neither
is there a greater beauty in the system, than if we believed that all things are governed by a Supreme Being, or by some subordinate nature employed by him’. For the Deity both confers and employs the powers, unlike the workman.

In sum, Reid does think his position differs from that of Leibniz in that it requires continual activity on the part of the deity. But if we admit Darwinian accounts of the emergence of species to the respectable scientific corpus, what then? We still have action on the part of the deity to make the species of animals and plants emerge but it is unclear whether we can still maintain in a sufficiently strong sense that God made these creatures, even though they could not have emerged without his exercising his power through his laws of nature, and even though the creatures display quite remarkable features.

However this may be, we clearly do seem to be confronted by a form of the problem of evil in Reid’s system of thought. God is at least answerable for which creatures there are in the world which he made. It is surely a good world that will issue from a deity of perfect moral character and with the powers Reid admits God to have: God is almighty, and all knowing. How is it then there is so much evil and sin in the world if it is subject to good government on the part of such a deity? How is it that there is any evil at all?

Varieties of Evil

In lecture 84 (D, 101), Reid tells us that all evil has been reduced by some to three classes, and he seems content to work with this division. These are, (1) the evils of imperfection; (2) natural evil; and (3) moral evil. I shall consider Reid’s expositions of these varieties of evil, beginning with the evils of imperfection.

Says Reid,

A man might have been much more perfect, he might have been an angel, a brute might have been a rational being & a plant might have been a brute animal—this however is not an evil it is only a less degree of good. (D, 101)

Some comment seems in order here. For one thing it seems clear enough that a human being with congenital heart disease might have been without such a condition, and so must be less perfect than he or she would be without it. But in this case we are inclined to say that the condition making for the
imperfection is an evil, while we are not inclined to say of a brute animal, such as a pig, lacking in rationality, that that lack is an evil. Why is this? For another thing it may be said that if there were fewer beings of lower orders of perfection and more of higher orders in this world then it would be a better world than it is, on this type of view. But we should remember that Reid is not wedded to the view that this is the best of all possible worlds. As he puts it:

Suppose a world twice, nay two thousand times more perfect than ours, still they could have been more perfect.

Presumably ‘they’ are the inhabitants of such a world.

And now let us turn to natural evil. Reid says that there is natural evil, ‘that is that suffering & pain which we see endured by beings in the universe’. For instance one suffers through having certain conditions, by being blind or having congenital heart disease. Or accidents or infections befall one. So perhaps Reid would admit that some conditions leading to imperfection, such as blindness, are productive of natural evil and that is why we think of these conditions as evils, as opposed to conditions merely making for a lower order of perfection. In any case he has further points to make concerning natural evils. He says,

We see that it is by natural evil that men are trained unto wisdom & prudence in their conduct…from the present constitution of things we see they are necessary to our acquiring any prudence or wisdom, or patience or resignation. (D, 101–2)

He allows, however, that it is not as simple as that. He admits that in a world governed by general laws ‘occasionally evils will happen’, even though without general laws rational creatures could never pursue any means for the attainment of ends. Thus,

If gravitation is a good general law & necessary to the presentation [preservation?] of our world, yet by this means (?) houses may fall & crush the inhabitants. (D, 102)

To say nothing of earthquakes and tsunamis! Reid remarks at this point that ‘we cannot determine what proportion this evil bears to the sum of the enjoyment of God’s creatures’. But presumably it cannot have escaped his
Thomas Reid and The Problem Of Evil

notice that much of this sort of evil, evil resulting from gravitation and plate tectonics and such, does not serve in any obvious way as a part of training in virtues for many of the people involved in such calamities. Many of them are killed instantly. Now it may well be that those that are instantly killed, or at least some of them, are quickly granted heavenly bliss. But this grant is no aid to further acquisition of virtue, although it may affect the balance between misery and the sum of the enjoyment of God’s creatures. In any case the fact that Reid has made this remark about our ignorance of the relative proportions of natural evil and enjoyment among creatures is, as we shall soon see, one of crucial importance.

Let us now turn to moral evil. For Reid moral evil is the misconduct of rational beings (D, 102), and he quickly moves to two possibilities. The first is that man is not a free agent. But then, says Reid, every event, good or bad, is to be considered God’s doing and the actions of the worst men are ‘equally imputable to Deity as the rising or setting of the sun’ (D, 102). And so the existence of moral evil implies an evil God. Perhaps this is a little too quick and we shall return to this point later.

The second possibility is that man is a free agent and Reid immediately adds to this possibility that to this free agent God has granted a certain sphere of power (D, 102ff). In this case the actions done by men are, Reid claims, not God’s actions but only the doings of men for which God has no responsibility, given they are done within that sphere of power. And, of course, what is the action of one agent cannot be the action of another. Reid is far from denying that to God ‘we must ascribe the lot in which we are placed by his Providence with all its advantages and disadvantages’ and that ‘by such a connection with our fellow men we are indeed liable to be sometimes hurt’. But the injurious actions that result in this hurt are not to be attributed to God but to the agents who have abused the power God gave them (D, 103).

At the end of Lecture 84 Reid says, by way of summing up, that it appears that the objection against a good administration of things brought either from the evils of imperfection, natural evil or moral evil have no force. And perhaps his hope was that in so doing he would be contributing to the moral and spiritual uplift of his mainly youthful lecture audience. But he is not so sanguine in Essay IV, chapter XI, of Essays on the Active Powers of Man. Thus,

The permission of natural and moral evil is a phenomenon that cannot be disputed. To account for this phenomenon under the government of a Being of infinite goodness, justice, wisdom and power, has, in all ages,
been considered as difficult to human reason, whether we embrace the system of liberty or that of necessity. \((H, 633a)\)

Later, Reid reminds us that to permit means, first, not to forbid, and, second, not to hinder by superior power \((H, 634b)\). He continues:

In the first of these senses God never permits sin. His law forbids every moral evil. By his laws and his government, he gives every encouragement to good conduct, and every discouragement to bad. But he does not always, by his superior power, hinder it from being committed … and this, it is said, is the very same thing as directly to will and to cause it.

So he acknowledges that even on the system of liberty the difficulty that God is responsible for the moral evil has not entirely disappeared. Reid claims here that the difficulty that God directly wills and causes moral evil is asserted without proof. But this much at least can be said: a powerful politician who denounces certain kinds of misdeed and is not aware that his subordinates are busy doing those misdeeds might get off the hook of personal responsibility in such a case, but God cannot ever be in such a state of unawareness.

On the system of necessity it may be that we need not accept that every event is to be considered merely as God’s doing. Thus it may be said that God made men with certain desires and certain reasoning powers and endowed them with certain moral sentiments and that actions done by men in accordance with desires accompanied by a rational awareness are to be imputed to them even if these are not free actions, stemming, perhaps, from the strongest desire. And then, perhaps, they would have responsibility for such actions to at least some degree. And so we need not impute all bad behaviour and its consequences to God alone on the system of necessity.

We saw above that Reid, in effect, admitted that we cannot determine what proportion the sum of natural evil bears to the sum of the enjoyment of God’s creatures. And we must not forget that a sizeable proportion of natural evil stems from moral evils that we encounter, such as greed, cruelty and sexual abuse of infants. I wonder whether this admission on Reid’s part in the lectures is a hint from him that were the sum of the enjoyment of God’s creatures to be outweighed by the sum of natural evil then this would be a further difficulty for the argument that we are under a good divine administration.
Reid’s Leibniz to the rescue?

In Lecture 84 of this series, Reid expounds a theory that he imputes to Leibniz that this world is the best possible. It is meant to serve as the best account of the origin of evil and as the most amiable representation of the divine perfections and administration. Reid expounds the theory as follows:

The supreme being from all eternity by his infinite understanding saw all the possible constitutions of worlds which could be and their various qualities. Among all the possible systems that could be he would choose that in which there was the greatest sum of happiness upon the whole. He then, from his infinite understanding and perfect goodness, constituted the present system as that which contained the greatest possible sum of happiness upon the whole. (D, 98)

This view presupposes, according to Reid, that ‘all the divine attributes consist in directing all things to produce the greatest degree of good on the whole’. So,

Though we give different names to the moral attributes of the deity such as justice, truth and righteousness they may all be resolved into one attribute and are only different modifications of his goodness and benevolence, that is, a disposition to promote the greatest degree of happiness on the whole in the universe.

But there is more, for the protagonists of such a position think that all the Evil we see in the world is a necessary ingredient in a system in which we see the greatest possible good; it was proper then to admit it and if we remove it an equal proportion of happiness is at the same time removed. (D, 99)

Now Reid is desperately unhappy with this theory. His unhappiness first, and perhaps foremost, stems from his opinion that the moral attributes of the deity are degraded by this position. In his view, ‘we can only form a just notion of moral character in Deity from what appears most perfect in moral character among human creatures when separated from all the imperfections with which they are attended in us’ (D, 99). Now ‘goodness alone is far from making a
perfect moral character in Man. We cannot conceive a moral character without a regard to Virtue and a dislike to Vice. To make the only principle of action in man to produce the happiness of others is to degrade his Nature. This, tho’ a necessary branch of Virtue, is not the whole of it.’

One difficulty for Reid’s position here is alluded to later:

Some… conceive that the attributing different moral attributes to the Deity is inconsistent with the simplicity and unity of his nature which we ought to ascribe to an infinitely perfect being. (D, 100)

In response he admits that our conceptions of the Supreme Being are undoubtedly inadequate but, such as they are, they are the result of our faculties and their imperfections must remain with us until our faculties are enlarged. How is this?

Reid offers some justification for attributing to the Deity a perfect moral character in the lecture 83. First, every real excellence in the effect is to be found in the cause, and so our excellences must be in the Deity. Second in the moral government of the world virtue is countenanced and vice discouraged, virtue being in itself rewarded by the approbation of our own minds. Third, the voice of conscience leads us to ascribe a perfect moral character to the Deity: shall not the judge of all the earth do right? (D, 84–5). Moreover, the laws of nature as far as we can know them ‘are fitted to promote the interest of his creatures and to give all that degree of happiness of which their several natures are capable’ (D, 86). This last, we have already seen, is open to considerable doubt. And given the sheer amount of sin to be encountered in this world one might also have considerable reservations about Reid’s view of the moral government of the world as expressed in this passage.

Indeed, if it were not the case, claims Reid, that a perfect moral character could be ascribed to the Deity, ‘and if these attributes to which we give names in man had not the same meaning when we turn to God, we would speak without understanding and could reason no way with regard to them’. This last consequence is one that Reid attributes to Hume, ‘in a posthumous work of his on Natural Religion’ (D, 95).

Next, Reid points out (D,99) that even if by this system we have the greatest possible sum of happiness for creatures nevertheless, within it, evil has a necessary and fatal connection with good and could not be removed even by divine power. But, it might be replied, how could God have the power to overturn his decrees or choices? Again, (D,99) Reid argues that,
This system leads to the necessity of all human actions... because it was necessary that every part should be adjusted to produce the greatest degree of happiness on the whole.

But it is not clear in what sense the actions are necessary. It is not clear that human beings have to be machines for a fatalistic scenario, such as this appears to be. But in any case Reid is surely right when he says of this theory that,

This is to suppose a Fate superior to the human being, which necessarily connects evil with the greatest possible sum of happiness.

In any case Reid is sure in ‘Of the permission of Evil’ (H, 633a), rightly or wrongly, that on this view God is

the proper cause and agent of all moral evil as well as good... He does evil that good may come, and this end sanctifies the worst actions that contribute to it. All the wickedness of men being the work of God, he must, when he surveys it, pronounce it, as well as all his other works, to be very good.

And there is yet another difficulty Reid explicitly raises for the position of Leibniz, based on his admission in the lectures of our lack of knowledge of how much natural evil there is in this world. In ‘Of the Permission of Evil’ he says:

A world made by perfect wisdom and Almighty power, for no other end but to make it happy, presents the most pleasing prospect that can be imagined. We expect nothing but uninterrupted happiness to prevail for ever. But, alas! When we consider that, in this happiest system, there must be necessarily all the misery and vice we see, and how much more we know not, how is the prospect darkened! (H, 634a)

The difficulty is that even if this world be the one with the greatest amount of happiness possible we still do not know if in this world, upon the whole, that happiness is not outweighed by misery, or suffering or vice. Here the hint given in the lectures that I mentioned above seems to be made explicit. Hence the theory brings us no closer to assurance that this is a good world than does an account which simply acknowledges that God sometimes permits the
abuse of liberty in moral agents and sometimes, for all we know, all too often allows harm to befall them.

I want to conclude this discussion of Leibniz’s theory according to Reid by noting how Reid deals with the following difficulty presented at the beginning of ‘Of the Permission of Evil’ that arises for those who, like himself, hold with both divine prescience and liberty in agents:

To suppose God to foresee and permit what was in his power to have prevented, is the very same thing as to suppose him to will, and directly to cause it. He distinctly foresees all the actions of a man’s life, and all the consequences of them. If therefore he did not think any particular man and his conduct proper for his plan of creation and providence, he certainly would not have introduced him into being at all. \((H, 632a)\)

Now Reid, by way of response to this reasoning, objects

That all the actions of a particular man should be distinctly foreseen, and at the same time that that man should never be brought into existence, seems to me to be a contradiction; and the same contradiction there is, in supposing any action to be distinctly foreseen, and yet prevented. \((H, 632b)\)

Now it certainly seems to be the case that Leibniz himself comes close to falling foul of this response in some formulations of his position that God chose to bring into being this world, along with such unsavoury characters as Judas Iscariot, as opposed to another possible world without him. Thus he says in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, section 30 (Woolhouse and Francks, p81f)

The only remaining question therefore is why such a Judas, the traitor, who in God’s idea is merely possible, actually exists. But to that question there is no reply to be expected on this earth, except that in general we should say that since God found it good that he should exist, despite the sin that he foresaw, it must be that this evil is repaid with interest somewhere in the universe, that God will derive some greater good from it, and all in all that it will turn out that the sequence of things which includes the existence of this sinner is the most perfect out of all the other possible ways.
It does seem clear that one can scarcely adopt such a position as this without being committed to the view that God did not choose to bring into being another possible world in which there was someone like Judas, but who did not betray Christ for 30 pieces of silver, because of what God could foresee about him and, no doubt, others in that world. If so, and Reid’s claim above is correct, then the very notion that God chose this world as the best possible sequence of things based on an assessment of foreseen outcomes is under threat. And that surely leaves the notion that this is the best possible world quite unsupported.

Even if it were true that this is the best possible world Reid would still be right to insist that (H,634a) in it

> There must necessarily be all the misery and vice we see, and how much more we cannot know.

So even if Leibniz’s position could be repaired this would still be the case. And so it is hard to see how his position poses any threat of being potentially superior to Reid’s position: one in which we cannot determine what proportion the sum of natural and moral evil bears to the sum of enjoyment of God’s creatures. Neither of them can establish that this world is a good world if that means one in which evil does not preponderate over good.

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