Direct Realism and Acquaintance in Reid

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William Alston, James Van Cleve, and Nicholas Wolterstorff have all raised the question of "acquaintance" in Reid. More specifically, each asks whether, on Reid's account, we are acquainted with external objects in perception. Put another way, they ask whether, on Reid's account, external objects are "present" to us in perception. As Wolterstorff notes, "presence" and "acquaintance" are different sides of the same coin: I enjoy acquaintance with an object insofar as it is present to me, and *vice versa*. (Wolterstorff, p. 20.) Al Alston and Wolterstorff answer these questions about presence and acquaintance in the negative: according to them, Reid does not hold that we have acquaintance with external objects in perception, or that external objects are present to us in perception. Van Cleve disagrees, answering the questions in the affirmative.

In this paper I will defend a third view. One might think there is no room for a third view here, but there is. This third view is that Reid would reject the questions being posed. On Reid's account, we shouldn't be talking about "presence" and "acquaintance" in relation to our perception of external objects. It's not that Reid denies that we have acquaintance with external objects in perception, or that such objects are present to us. Rather, Reid understands these terms as "analogical" and "figurative," and he insists that we ought to avoid using analogical or figurative language in describing operations of the mind. He would much prefer that we replace our questions with literal ones, and that we give those questions literal answers. If we do not, Reid thinks, we are in danger of falling into mistakes and confusions. That is my first thesis.

My second thesis is that once we do replace these questions posed in "figurative" language with questions posed in literal language, Reid's answers to the latter are fairly straightforward. That is, Reid's account of perception and the objects of perception is fairly straightforward: he thinks that perception is "direct" and that the object of perception is an "external" object. Of course, "external" and "direct" are used figuratively here, but their meaning is easily put into literal terms. We will see that "external" means mind-independent, and that Reid thinks perception is "direct" in several different senses. Most importantly, Reid thinks that perception a) does not involve reasoning or inference, b) does not involve sensation as an intentional object, c) need not involve sensations at all, and d) need not involve evidential grounds. Finally, I will end the paper with a question for the friends of acquaintance, or more precisely, for the friends of the language of acquaintance, whether they use that language to affirm acquaintance or to deny it. The question is: What is acquaintance supposed to be anyway? Or, What are presence and acquaintance supposed to be? The question is pressing because there has been a lot of ink spilt over presence and acquaintance, both in support of claims that we have acquaintance with various sorts of objects, and in denial of such claims. For example, post-modernism is often *defined* in terms of the denial of presence. In analytic philosophy, philosophers from Russell to Sellars to Alston have inquired whether we are acquainted with anything, and if so, what things. In the context of all this play, it would be nice

to know what acquaintance is.

The question is pressing for another reason, closer to the present context. Namely, Alston, Van Cleve and Wolterstorff seem to *agree* about Reid's positions regarding the issues I called "straightforward" above. That is, all agree that, according to Reid, the intentional object in perception is mind-independent, that perception does not involve reasoning or inference, and that perception need not involve evidential grounds at all. So when they *disagree* about acquaintance in Reid, what are they disagreeing about? There is at least a suspicion that Reid's worries about analogy and figurative language are right—that such language serves only to confuse the relevant philosophical issues, and should therefore be dropped altogether. Here is another way to put my question, which I now ask on behalf of Reid: When we replace the language of "presence" and "acquaintance" with the more literal language of intentionality, inference, and evidence, do we lose anything in the translation? Does the metaphorical language get at anything more than the issues posed in these more literal terms? Reid's suspicion would be that the answer is "no"—that the only thing added by analogy and figurative language is confusion. At the very least, he would think, the burden to show otherwise is on the friends of the figurative language. That is my third thesis, if you like—that Reid is right about this.

1. Reid and the language of acquaintance.

Reid is quite explicit about the dangers of analogy and figurative language when inquiring into the operations of the mind.

> In vain should we attempt to avoid this analogical language, for we have no other language upon the subject; yet it is dangerous, and apt to mislead. All analogical and figurative words have a double meaning; and, if we are not very much upon our guard, we slide insensibly from the borrowed and figurative meaning into the primitive. We are prone to carry the parallel between the things compared farther than it will hold, and thus very naturally to fall into error. (E, 363)

In this regard, Reid distinguishes two methodologies for conducting inquires in the mind's powers and operations.

> There are two ways in which men may form their notions and opinions concerning the mind, and concerning its powers and operations. The first is the only way that leads to truth; but it is narrow and rugged, and few have entered upon it. The second is. . . well adapted to the purposes of the poet and orator: but, in philosophical disquisitions concerning the mind, it leads to error and delusion.
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> We may call the first of these ways, *the way of reflection*.. . . . The second, and the most common way, in which men form their opinions concerning the mind and its operations, we may call *the way of analogy*. . . . (I, 201)

Reid is especially wary of analogies drawn from the material world. That is, when inquiring into the powers and operations of the mind, it is both natural and dangerous to invoke analogies to sensible objects. First, it is natural that we use such language.

> Every man is apt to form his notions of things difficult to be apprehended, or less

> familiar, from their analogy to things which are more familiar. Thus, if a man bred to the seafaring life, and accustomed to think and talk only of matters relating to navigation, enters into discourse upon any other subject, it is well known that the language and the notions proper to his own profession are infused into every subject, and all things are measured by the rules of navigation. . . .
>
> Sensible objects, of one kind or other, do no less occupy and engross the rest of mankind, than things relating to navigation the seafaring man. For a considerable part of life, we can think of nothing but the objects of sense; and, to attend to objects of another nature, so as to form clear and distinct notions of them, is no easy matter, even after we come to years of reflection. (I, 202)

But this natural tendency is also dangerous.

> . . . if [the seafaring man] should take it into his head to philosophize concerning the faculties of the mind, it cannot be doubted but he would draw his notions from the fabric of his ship, and would find in the mind, sails, masts, rudder, and compass. . . .
>
> The condition of mankind, therefore, affords good reason to apprehend that their language, and their common notions concerning the mind and its operations, will be analogical, and derived from the objects of sense; and that these analogies will be apt to impose upon philosophers, as well as upon the vulgar, and to lead them to materialize the mind and its faculties: and experience abundantly confirms the truth of this. (I, 202)

Finally, Reid warns us specifically about the metaphor of presence. It is the use of this metaphor, he says, that is directly responsible for the most common errors regarding the nature of mind and its operations; i.e. the errors that Reid associates with the theory of ideas.

> There are two prejudices which seem to me to have given rise to the theory of ideas in all the various forms in which it has appeared in the course of above two thousand years; and, though they have no support from the natural dictates of our faculties, or from attentive reflection upon their operations, they are prejudices which those who speculate upon this subject are very apt to be led into by analogy.
>
> The *first* is—That, in all the operations of the understanding, there must be some immediate intercourse between the mind and its object, so that the one may act upon the other. The *second*, That, in all operations of understanding, there must be an object of thought, which really exists while we think of it; or, as some philosophers have expressed it, that which is not cannot be intelligible.
>
> Had philosophers perceived that these are prejudices grounded only upon analogical reasoning, we had never heard of ideas in the philosophical sense of that word. [E, 368]
>
> In a word, these two principles carry us into the whole philosophical theory of ideas, and furnish every argument that ever was used for their existence. If they are true, that system must be admitted with all its consequences. If they are only prejudices, grounded upon analogical reasoning, the whole system must fall to the ground with them. [E, 369]

How, exactly, does the metaphor of presence motivate the theory of ideas?

> The *first* of these principles has led philosophers to think that, as the external objects of sense are too remote to act upon the mind immediately, there must be some image or shadow of them that is present to the mind, and is the immediate object of perception. [E, 368]

That is, the metaphor of presence motivates exactly the sort of analogical reasoning that Reid warns against—reasoning that takes the similarities between things too far, and that draws false conclusions about the analogue as a result. Reid finds the same sort of reasoning stated explicitly. Here he quotes Samuel Clarke:

> The soul, without being present to the images of the things perceived, could not possibly perceive them. A living substance can only there perceive, where it is present, either to the things themselves, (as the omnipresent God is to the whole universe,) or to the images of things, as the soul is in its proper *sensorium*. (Reid quoting Clarke, E, 300-1)
>
> We are sure that the soul cannot perceive what it is not present to, because nothing can act, or be acted upon, where it is not. (Reid quoting Clarke, E, 301)

Next Reid quotes "The ingenious Dr. Porterfield":

> How bodies act upon mind, or mind upon body, I know not; but this I am very certain of, that nothing can act, or be acted upon, where it is not; and therefore our mind can never perceive anything but its own proper modifications, and the various states of the sensorium, to which it is present: so that it is not the external sun and moon which are in the heavens, which our mind perceives, but only their image or representation impressed upon the sensorium. How the soul of a seeing man sees these images. . . I know not; but I am sure it can never perceive the external bodies themselves, to which it is not present. (Reid quoting Porterfield, E, 301)

The reasoning in these passages can be reconstructed as follows.

1. Regarding the actions of external bodies, there is no action at a distance. In other words, no act or operation *by* an external body is possible unless the object of the act is immediately present, and no act or operation *upon* an external body is possible unless the acting object is immediately present.

Therefore,

2. No act or operation by a mind is possible unless the object of the act is immediately present, and no act or operation upon a mind is possible unless the acting object is immediately present. (from 1, by analogy with bodies)

3. But material objects are not immediately present to the mind.

Therefore,

4. The object of perception must be some other object, which is immediately present to the mind. (from 2 and 3)

Reid replies by accepting premise (1) but denying that perception involves an "act" or "action" in any relevant sense.

> When we say that one being acts upon another, we mean that some power or force is exerted by the agent, which produces, or has a tendency to produce, a change in the thing acted upon. If this be the meaning of the phrase, as I conceive it is, there appears no reason for asserting that, in perception, either the object acts upon the mind, or the mind upon the object. (E, 301)

The perception of an external object, therefore, involves no act in the relevant sense: "An object, in being perceived, does not act at all. I perceive the walls of the room where I sit; but they are perfectly inactive, and therefore do not act upon the mind." (E, 301) Neither does the mind act upon the object perceived. The operation of the mind in perception, Reid tells us, is what logicians call an "immanent act," or an act that produces no effect upon its object. But we don't even need the subtle distinctions of logicians, Reid says: "To perceive an object is one thing, to act upon it is another . . . . To say that I act upon the wall by looking at it, is an abuse of language, and has no meaning." (301)

So how do philosophers fall into such confusions? Reid's diagnosis is clear:

> Nor could men ever have gone into this notion, that perception is owning to some action of the object upon the mind, were it not that we are so prone to form our notions of mind from some similitude we conceive between it and body. Thought in the mind is conceived to have some analogy to motion in a body: and, as a body is put in motion, by being acted upon by some other body; so we are apt to think the mind is made to perceive, by some impulse it receives from the object. But reasonings, drawn from such analogies, ought never to be trusted. They are, indeed, the cause of most of our errors with regard to the mind. (301)

Again,

> This notion, that, in perception, the object must be contiguous to the percipient, seems, with many other prejudices, to be borrowed from analogy. In all the external senses, there must, as has been before observed, be some impression made upon the organ of sense by the object, or by something coming from the object. An impression supposes contiguity. Hence, we are led by analogy to conceive something similar in the operations of the mind . . . . And though no philosopher will now pretend to justify such analogical reasoning as this, yet it has a powerful influence upon the judgment, while we

> contemplate the operations of our minds, only as they appear through the deceitful medium of such analogical notions and expressions. (E, 302)

Notice that Reid's reply to the reasoning sketched above is not that external objects *are* present to the mind in perception. Neither does he reply that such a relation is lacking, but that none is needed. Rather, he rejects the figurative language and the analogical reasoning altogether. His position is that we ought not to run our arguments about the mind on such analogies, or state our positions about the mind in these figurative terms. These sorts of arguments and these sorts of terms constitute a "deceitful medium." As such, they serve only to breed confusion and error, and to thereby block philosophical progress.

2. Reid on perception.

Suppose we drop the metaphorical (or "figurative") language of presence and acquaintance. My second thesis is that, in literal terms, Reid's account of perception and the objects of perception is fairly straightforward. Specifically, it is straightforward that Reid thinks that the objects of perception are mind-independent objects rather than ideas.

> Ideas are said to be things internal and present, which have no existence but during the moment they are in the mind. The objects of sense are things external, which have a continued existence. (*Essays,* 358)

Moreover, Reid thinks that a) perception does not involve reasoning or inference, b) perception does not involve thinking about sensations—there is no intentional object in perception other than the mind-independent object itself, c) perception need not involve sensations at all, and d) perception need not involve evidential grounds. Finally, Reid is also clear about the epistemic status of perception. That is, he thinks that perception gives rise to knowledge of mind-independent objects. In fact, says Reid, this knowledge is of equal authority with other kinds of knowledge, for example that provided by reason.

a) Perception does not involve inference.

Read is as explicit about this as he could be, and so we may simply acknowledge his own words.

> If, therefore, we attend to that act of our mind which we call the perception of an external object of sense, we shall find in it these three things:-- *First*, Some conception or notion of the object perceived; *Secondly*, A strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence; and, *Thirdly*, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (*Essays,* 258)

> [I]t is not by a train of reasoning and argumentation that we come to be convinced of the existence of what we perceive; we ask no argument for the existence of the object, but that we perceive it; perception commands our belief upon its own authority, and disdains to rest its authority upon any reasoning whatsoever. (*Essays,* 259)

b) perception does not involve sensation as an intentional object.

As we have seen, Reid thinks that the intentional object in perception is an external (or mind-independent) object.

> Perception is applied only to external objects, not to those that are in the mind itself. When I am pained, I do not say that I perceive pain, but that I feel it, or that I am conscious of it. (222)

Moreover, the mind-independent object is the *only* object of thought in perception. This is in contrast to the Theory of Ideas, which holds that mind-independent objects are only mediate objects of perception, the immediate object being a sensation or idea. In fact, Reid argues that the notion of a mediate object of thought is incoherent.

> [Locke] has never attempted to shew how there can be objects of thought which are not immediate objects; and, indeed, this seems impossible. For, whatever the object be, the man either thinks of it, or he does not. There is no medium between these. If he thinks of it, it is an immediate object of thought while he thinks of it. If he does not think of it, it is no object of thought at all. Every object of thought, therefore, is an immediate object of thought, and the word *immediate*, joined to objects of thought, seems to be a mere expletive. (*Essays*, p. 427b. See also 278-9)

It seems clear that in these passages Reid is affirming a kind of immediacy—what we might call "intentional immediacy," or immediacy regarding the object of thought. Moreover, he is claiming that intentional *mediacy* is incoherent—there can be no object of thought that is not the immediate object of thought.

> . . . It seems very hard, or rather impossible, to understand what is meant by an object of thought that is not an immediate object of thought. A body in motion may move another that was at rest, by the medium of a third body that is interposed. This is easily understood; but we are unable to conceive any medium interposed between a mind and the thought of that mind; and, to think of any object by a medium, seems to be words without any meaning. (278)

We have seen that perception does not involve reasoning or inference from sensations. For example, we do not reason from appearance to reality in perception, or infer conclusions about real objects from premises about sensory appearances. We now see that perception does not involve sensations as mediating objects of thought. It is clear that sensory appearances play some role in perception, however. Specifically, Reid thinks, sensations serve as *signs* of mind-independent objects and their properties. But perceptual signs, Reid thinks, become the grounds for beliefs about mind-independent objects without becoming objects of beliefs themselves. That is, sensations are able to act as signs for external objects, even though the sensations are not themselves made an object of thought.

> There is, no doubt, a sensation by which we perceive a body to be hard or soft . . . . We are so accustomed to use the sensation as a sign, and to pass immediately to the thing

> signified, that, as far as appears, it was never made an object of thought, either by the vulgar or by philosophers; nor has it a name in any language. There is no sensation more distinct, or more frequent; yet it is never attended to, but passes through the mind instantaneously, and serves only to introduce that quality in bodies, which, by a law of our constitution, it suggests. (*Inquiry,* 120)
>
> When a primary quality is perceived, the sensation immediately leads our thought to the quality signified by it, and is itself forgot. We have no occasion afterwards to reflect upon it; and so we come to be as little acquainted with it as if we had never felt it. (EIP II.xvii: 315b

c) Perception need not involve sensations at all.

In the typical case, then, perception involves sensations as signs of mind-independent objects and their properties. But on Reid's view, this is only a contingent fact about human perception, rather than a necessary feature of perception per se. God could have made us so that we perceive external objects directly; that is, without the involvement of sensory appearances.

> We might, perhaps, have been made of such a constitution as to have our present perceptions connected with other sensations. We might, perhaps, have had the perceptions of external objects, without either impressions upon the organs of sense, or sensations. Or, lastly, the perceptions we have, might have been immediately connected with the impressions upon our organs, without any intervention of sensations. (187)

Reid's idea is essentially as follows: As a matter of fact, human perception takes place by means of two separate dispositions. The first is a disposition to go from physical "impressions" on the sense organs to mental "sensations" caused by those impressions. The second is to go from these sensations to beliefs about physical objects. What Reid is suggesting is that God could have eliminated the "middleman" in the process. There is no reason why physical impressions on our sense organs could not have led immediately to beliefs about the objects that cause those impressions.

In fact, Reid thinks, a certain ranges of human perception work in just this way.

> When I see an object, the appearance of which the colour of it makes, may be called *the sensation*, which suggests to me some external thing as its cause; but it suggests likewise the individual direction and position of this cause with regard to the eye. I know it is precisely in such a direction, and in no other. At the same time, I am not conscious of anything that can be called *sensation*, but the sensation of colour. The position of the coloured thing is no sensation; but it is by the laws of my constitution presented to the mind along with the colour, without any additional sensation. (145)

Reid goes on to describe how this might happen.

> We have reason to believe, that the rays of light make some impression upon the *retina*; but we

are not conscious of this impression . . . . Now, this material impression, made upon a particular point of the *retina*, by the laws of our constitution, suggests two things to the mind—namely, the colour and the position of some external object . . . . And since there is no necessary connection between these two things suggested by this material impression, it might, if it had so pleased our Creator, have suggested one of them without the other. Let us suppose therefore, since it plainly appears to be possible, that our eyes had been so framed as to suggest to us the position of the object, without suggesting colour, or any other quality: What is the consequence of this supposition? It is evidently this, that the person endued with such an eye, would perceive the visible figure of bodies, without having any sensation or impression made upon his mind. (146)

Finally, Reid draws his conclusion:

> If we suppose, last of all, that the eye hath the power restored of perceiving colour, I apprehend that it will be allowed, that now it perceives figure in the very same manner as before, with this difference only, that colour is always joined with it.
>
> In answer, therefore, to the question proposed, there seems to be no sensation that is appropriate to visible figure, or whose office it is to suggest it. (146)

According to Reid, then, perception need not involve sensations at all: God could have made us so that we perceive external objects without sensations, and in fact He did make us so that we perceive visible figure without sensations.

d) Perception need not involve evidential grounds.

These same considerations show that, on Reid's view, perception need not involve evidential grounds at all. That is, perception does not involve propositional evidence, as when one reasons from premises to conclusion, nor need it involve sensory evidence, as when one interprets a sensory sign. Since Reid does not recognize any further sort of evidential ground, we may conclude that, on his view, perception need not involve any evidential grounds at all.

e) Perception has an authority equal to reason.

Nevertheless, perception is a *source* of evidence and a source of knowledge. Reid's views about the epistemic status of perception and perceptual beliefs are clear: perception constitutes a kind of evidence, and the evidence of perception is of equal authority with that of reason. "The first principles of every kind of reasoning are given us by Nature, and are of equal authority with the faculty of reason itself, which is also the gift of Nature." (IHM VI.xx: 185b; B 172). In particular, "the evidence of sense [is] no less reasonable than that of demonstration." (EIP II.xx: 328b) "Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception?", Reid asks. After all, "they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?" (IHM VI.xx: 183b; B 169)

3. What more is acquaintance?

Alston, Van Cleve and Wolterstorff all raise the question whether, on Reid's view, the sort of conception that takes place in perception is equivalent to acquaintance. Alston and Wolterstroff

both answer no. Van Clever answers yes. Here is Wolterstorff. (The discussion by Alston occurs at pp. 42-45.)

> It's natural to suppose that all our information about the world is, at bottom, acquired by, and evidentially grounded in, acquaintance . . . . A striking feature of Reid's analysis of perception is the tacit denial of this ever-so-natural assumption. Perception does indeed give us knowledge of the external world, but the apprehensions that are ingredient in perception are not acquaintances with the external world, nor with anything else; in particular, they are not acquaintances with sensations. (161).

Here is Van Cleve.

> Reid mentions two ways in which we may obtain conceptions of individuals (EIP 4.1, 364b) If I have never seen Westminster Bridge, I may conceive of it by means of a description it satisfies, e.g., *a bridge from Westminster over the Thames*. This mode of conception is similar to what Russell calls knowledge by description, and it does involve Kantian concepts. But if an object is present to my senses, I need no such description in order to conceive of it; I need only mentally point it out. This mode of conception is similar to what Russell called knowledge by acquaintance, and it is more akin to Kantian intuition than to Kantian conceptualization. (Van Cleve, "Reid's Theory of Perception, p. 6.)

In particular, the sort of conception operative in perception amounts to acquaintance.

> Reid's taxonomy of the operations of the mind leaves room, then, for acts of apprehension or acquaintance whereby an object is presented to the mind without any conceptualization. Should we so understand the conception that is an ingredient in perception? I believe the answer is yes . . . . (Van Cleve, "Reid's Theory of Perception, p. 6.)

It seems clear, however, that "conception" does not usually mean "acquaintance" in Reid. For whatever acquaintance is supposed to be, one cannot be acquainted with something unless it exists. Conversely, something cannot be present to one unless it exists. But conception, Reid says, does not imply the existence of the object conceived.

> Whatever we perceive, whatever we remember, whatever we are conscious of, we have a full persuasion or conviction of its existence. But we may conceive or imagine what has no existence, and what we firmly believe to have no existence. What never had an existence *at present* cannot be the object of perception or of consciousness; but what never had, nor has any existence, may be conceived. Every man knows that it is as easy to conceive a winged horse, or a centaur, as it is to conceive a horse or a man. (223)

The point holds regarding both sorts of conception involved in thinking about the Westminster Bridge. Years after I perceive the bridge without means of a description, I can remember the bridge without means of a description, and even if the bridge no longer exists. So neither of

Reid's ways of conceiving the bridge amounts to acquaintance.

If conception is not acquaintance in Reid, then what is it? Here I defend what I will call "Reid's minimalism about conception": To conceive a thing is simply to think about it.

> *Conceiving, imagining, apprehending, understanding, having a notion of a thing*, are common words, used to express that operation of the understanding which the logicians call *simple apprehension*. The *having an idea of a thing*, is, in common language, used in the same sense, chiefly, I think, since Mr. Locke's time. (360)

> In popular language, idea signifies the same thing as conception, apprehension, notion. To have an idea of anything, is to conceive it. To have a distinct idea, is to conceive it distinctly. To have no idea of it, is not to conceive it at all . . . . When the word idea is taken in this popular sense, no man can possibly doubt whether he has ideas. For he that doubts must think, and to think is to have ideas. (224)

In contemporary terms, to conceive a thing is for it to be the object of an intentional act.

> That we may not impose upon ourselves in this matter, we must distinguish between that act or operation of the mind, which we call conceiving an object, and the object which we conceive. When we conceive anything, there is a real act or operation of the mind. Of this we are conscious, and can have no doubt of its existence. But every such act must have an object; for he that conceives must conceive something

These passages make it clear that conception for Reid is not knowledge by acquaintance because it is not knowledge at all. He means no more by "conception" than a basic intentional act, or any act of thought about any object. Similarly, we have seen that when Reid talks about "the immediate object of thought," whether in perception or elsewhere, he means no more than "the object of thought," or "the object that is thought about."

This leaves open, however, whether perception involves acquaintance in some other way. Alston and Van Cleve both follow Russell by contrasting knowledge by acquaintance with knowledge by description. In addition to this, both identify acquaintance with what they call "presentational directness." Here is a passage in which Alston defines the latter phrase. [1]

> Presentational Directness. In perception an external object is directly 'presented' to our awareness; it is 'given' to consciousness. We are immediately aware of it, as contrasted with just thinking about it, forming a concept of it, or believing something about it . . . . This is 'knowledge by acquaintance' rather than 'knowledge by description'. (Alston, 36)

Wolterstorff also invokes Russell and the idea of a non-conceptual, non-descriptive, mode of awareness.

> Though I can get a mental grip on *your* feeling of dizziness by apprehensive use of a singular concept, the *dizziness that you are presently experiencing*, my mental grip on my own present feeling of dizziness is very different: I *feel* it, and am fully aware of doing so. It's *present* to me, and I'm aware that it is.

> What word shall we use to pick out this third mode of apprehension? I propose using the word that Bertrand Russell used for exactly the same purpose: "acquaintance." (20)

As Alston puts it, acquaintance involves "a non-conceptual, non-propositional mode of awareness." (37) All this suggests that the place to find acquaintance, if one is to find it anywhere, is in sensory appearances, or in the ways external objects appear in sensation. This is exactly where Alston and Wolterstorff think that we *do* have acquaintance with external objects, and this is where they distinguish their own views from Reid's.[2] Van Cleve follows Alston and Wolterstorff in framing the issue this way, but goes on to argue that Reid affirms the relevant sort of directness in sensation.

The problem with framing the issue this way, however, is that it never gets beyond analogy and figurative language. To "present something directly" rather than "indirectly," or for something to be "given directly" rather than "indirectly" is still all metaphor. Worse than that, it is exactly the kind of material object metaphor that Reid specifically warns against.

But what about Alston's idea that acquaintance is "a non-conceptual, non-propositional mode of awareness," and what about the related idea that knowledge by acquaintance is to be contrasted with knowledge by description? Doesn't this replace the figurative language with literal language—that of conceptual or descriptive content? It does, but it does so in a way that does not help us with the problem. This is because, as Alston points out, nearly *anyone* will affirm that sensation involves "a non-conceptual, non-propositional mode of awareness." Put another way, nearly anyone (and this includes Reid) will agree that sensation involves a phenomenal content—that in sensation the perceived object appears phenomenally to the perceiver. What more is the idea of "presentational directness" supposed to involve? Once again, if the "more" here does not go beyond metaphor and analogy, then the question about "what more" has not been adequately answered.

4. Acquaintance as an ontological thesis.

So what more is acquaintance supposed to be, if not inferential, evidential or intentional directness? One possibility that suggests itself is that the thesis about acquaintance in perception is an ontological thesis. This interpretation of Alston accords with his claim that what he calls "The Theory of Appearing" (TA) is superior to both the sense data theory and to Reid's adverbial theory of perception. The central claim of TA is an ontological claim: that in perception, the appearance of an object is a two-place relation between the object perceived and the perceiver. This is in contrast to both a) the sense data theory, which understands perception as a three-place relation among external object, sense-data and perceiver, and b) the adverbial theory, which understands sensory experience as a modification of the perceiver.

> The theory of appearing . . . takes perceptual consciousness to consist, most basically, in the fact that one or more objects *appear* to the subject *as so-and-so*, as round, bulgy, blue, jagged, etc. . . . Thus TA takes perceptual consciousness to be ineluctably *relational* in character. And, where one is genuinely perceiving objects, situations, and events in the external environment, it takes this to involve relations to external objects.[3]

> . . . in normal perception, [the object about which ???] the perceptual belief is formed is *within* the sensory experience itself, appearing to be so-and-so. . . . Since the link with that object is already embodied in the constitution of the experience itself, one can readily understand that, and how, the experience provides justification for beliefs about that object.[4]

In this respect TA is similar to the disjunctive theory of experience defended by William Brewer, John McDowell and others. On that view, perceptual experience is of a different ontological category than hallucinations, dreams and the like. That is, perceptual experience has an ontological structure, involving a relation between perceiver and perceived object, that is lacking in other sorts of experience that are subjectively indistinguishable. Here we have a substantive difference from Reid, who holds that perception involves the same kind of experience as does sensation. In McDowell's language, Reid holds that there is a "highest common factor" in both veridical perceptual and non-perceptual illusion.[5] In Reid's language, perception involves sensation, but adds a belief about and a relation to the external object of perception.

Should we understand acquaintance in these terms? In that case, to be acquainted with an object of perception is to have an experience with a particular ontological structure—it is to it have an experience that is in part constituted, and whose intentional content is in part constituted, by one's relation to the object of perception.[6] This depends, in part, on how closely we think the ontological issues involved herein hook up with the epistemic issues that have traditionally been the focus of discussions about acquaintance. Alston and McDowell think that these issues are intimately related. Elsewhere, I have argued that the issues are not as closely related as is often supposed. At the very least, however, we have here a question that is well formed, in the sort of language that Reid would prefer.

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[1] The passage is quoted by Van Cleve, who then adopts the same terminology in his own essay.

[2] See Alston, "Back tot he Theory of Appearing," Philosophical Perspectives. Wolterstorff expresses sympathy for the view at Wolterstorff, 155-6.

[3] "Back to the Theory of Appearing," p. 182.

[4] "Back to the Theory of Appearing," in *Philosophical Perspectives, 13, Epistemology,* James Tomberlin, ed. (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Press, 1999), pp. 200-1.

[5] "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68 (1982).

[6] On McDowell's view the relation in question is causal. On Alston's view it is irreducible.