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making the distinction. His American friend and correspondent, Samuel Johnson, pressed him for an explanation of the matter, but never got a satisfactory answer. [*Correspondence*, II, pp. 271-294]

8. J. D. Mabbott, "The Place of God in Berkeley's Philosophy," in *Locke and Berkeley* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1968), p. 372.

9. See Berkeley's account of creation. [DHP, II, 250-255]

10. George Pitcher, "Minds and Ideas in Berkeley," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 6 (1969), pp. 198-207.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Phillip Cummins, "Berkeley's Ideas of Sense," *Nous*, vol. 9 (1975), pp. 55-72.

14. Pitcher, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

15. See [PHK, II, 42 f] and [DHP, II, 194-197].

16. See [PHK, II, 41 f] and [DHP, II, 244]. See, also, how Luce treats these passages, in A. A. Luce, "The Berkeleyan Idea of Sense," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary vol. 27 (1953), pp. 2-5; A. A. Luce, *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, "The Perceived Object," Ch. III, A. A. Luce, "Berkeley's Existence in the Mind," *Mind*, vol. 50 (1941), pp. 258-267.

17. Mabbott, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 372 ff.

21. See A. A. Luce's discussion of this problem in "Seeing All Things in God," *Berkeley and Malebranche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 70-91. Luce does not reconstruct Berkeley's argument. However, he insists, partly on historical grounds, that there are respects in which Berkeley disagreed with Malebranche and also respects in which he agreed with Malebranche.

22. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 5, *Hobbes to Hume* (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1964) pp. 244 ff. S. A. Grave, "The Mind and Its Ideas," *op. cit.*, pp. 304 ff. In the first part of his paper, Grave comes as close as any commentator to facing the problem I discuss in this paper; however, because of his mistaken view of this passage in Berkeley, he hints at the wrong answer.

23. Pitcher, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

24. For more discussion of this problem, see Pitcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-207 and I. C. Tipton, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-95.

25. H. B. Acton, "Berkeley," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 1, p. 301.

26. A. A. Luce, *Berkeley and Malebranche*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

27. A short version of this paper was presented at the 1978 Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association.

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THOMAS REID ON EPISTEMIC PRINCIPLES

William P. Alston

I

THERE is much in Reid's epistemology that is of importance, both historically and substantively. Among Reid's distinctive contributions are his "fallibilism," the view that a source of belief that is fallible can be a source of knowledge, the concept of *prima facie* justification, and his open-endedly pluralistic account of types of "evidence." But in this paper I will concentrate on what I believe to Reid's most important potential contribution to current epistemology, his account of the status of basic epistemological principles. His insights on this point have by no means been assimilated by contemporary epistemology.

Let me first lay out in a general way the issue on which I discern an important Reidian contribution. Epistemologists are concerned to specify conditions under which we know that so-and-so, and conditions under which a belief of a certain sort is justified, rational, acceptable, or reliably acquired. But what about the principles in which such conditions are laid down? What is their epistemic status? What does it take for them to be known or for someone to justifiably accept them? Are they self-evident? Are they based on reasons, and if so what kind of reasons? Does the justification of such a principle presuppose still another such principle, and does this give rise to an infinite regress? Or is it somehow a fundamental mistake to think of such principles as known or justified? It is one of Reid's great merits as a philosopher to face such issues more explicitly than anyone before the twentieth century.

Reid's most explicit treatment of this issue is found in his discussion of what he in the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* calls "first principles" and, more commmonly in his earlier work, the *Inquiry Into The Human Mind*, "principles of common sense." Because of ludicrous misunderstandings of Reid to which the latter term has given rise,[1] I shall follow the *Essays* in preferring the former designation. First principles turn out to be a heterogeneous assortment indeed. Let's leave aside the use of "principle" for a psychological faculty or disposition, and restrict ourselves to principles as certain kinds of propositions. The lists of principles in *Essays*, I, 2 and VI, 5 and 6, comprise metaphysics, grammar,

logic, aesthetics, and ethics, as well as epistemology. Confining ourselves to the latter, they all have to do with the *reliability* of our cognitive faculties, or to use an older term, with their *veracity*. This is often put in terms of the real existence of what a given faculty seems to reveal.

> ... I shall take it for granted, that I *think*, that I *remember*, that I *reason*, and, in general, that I really perform all those operations of mind of which I am conscious.[2]
>
> ... those things did really happen which I distinctly remember.[3]
>
> ... those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be.[4]

Sometimes the principle is in terms of a faculty as a source of knowledge.

> As by consciousness we know certainly the existence of our present thought and passions; so we know the past by remembrance.[5]

In VI, 5 we get a blanket endorsement of our cognitive faculties.

> ... the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious.[6]

Another "first principle" constitutes a blanket endorsement of "things wherein we find an *universal agreement*, among the learned and unlearned, in the different nations and ages of the world."[7] This is said to include such items as "the existence of a material world" and "those things which they see and handle are real, and not mere illusions or apparitions."[8] Finally particular deliverances of the senses, memory, and so on, are treated as first principles.

> ... I shall also take for granted such facts as are attested to the conviction of all sober and reasonable men, either by our senses, by memory, or by human testimony.[9]

It is clear that the common thread through all this is the thesis of the reliability of our basic cognitive faculties. With the possible exception of "consciousness," our awareness of our mental states and operations, Reid does not claim infallibility for these faculties. Reliability is to be understood here as *—yielding true beliefs by and large, for the most part, generally*. Alternatively we might think of this as yielding true beliefs "when the proper circumstances concur," to use a phrase Reid employs in a slightly different context.[10] Or, to depart further from the letter though not the spirit of Reid, we may think of the thesis of reliability as the thesis that a belief acquires a strong *prima facie* presumption of truth by virtue of the fact that it issues from our basic cognitive faculties. To avoid these more complex issues, let's think of the reliability claim simply as the claim that most of the beliefs generated by the faculty in question are true. To further fix our thoughts, let's concentrate on the faculty of sense perception, focusing on the following principle:

II

Perceptual beliefs about the immediate physical environment are generally true.

Let's pause for a moment to reflect on what the above characterization of Reidian epistemic principles tells us about the general character of Reid's epistemology. In terms of contemporary lines of division, it certainly looks as if Reid is some sort of reliability theorist. To be sure, we cannot draw that inference from the mere fact that Reid is interested in the reliability of our basic cognitive faculties. Any epistemologist, whatever his orientation, may quite properly be interested in this. The point is, rather, that when Reid comes, in Essays I and VI of the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* to formulate what he takes to be "first principle," the only such principles that are distinctively epistemological are those that have to do with the reliability of our faculties. There are no principles that tell us the conditions under which one or another sort of belief is justified, rational, evident, or the like. Thus it would seem that, for Reid, the basic epistemological question concerns the reliability of various sources of belief. Here we have two emphases characteristic of contemporary reliability theory. First the central issue concerns the genesis of beliefs, how or from what they are formed. Second, the crucial feature of a source is its veridicality, its tendency to produce true rather than false beliefs. The basic question concerns whether beliefs that are formed in a certain way can be relied on to give us the truth, rather than whether beliefs that satisfy certain conditions thereby satisfy certain *normative* standards of rationality or whatever. And with this comes the grounding of epistemology in cognitive psychology, again a prominent theme both in Reid and in contemporary reliability theory.

I don't want to suggest that Reid puts forward a reliability account of the nature of knowledge, for he proffers no such account at all. However the fact that his epistemological first principles have to do exclusively with reliability strongly suggests that this is the sort of account he would give if he should turn his attention to the question. And, quite apart from questions about the nature of knowledge, it is clear that the reliability of our cognitive faculties is Reid's central epistemological concern.

In this connection, we must also recognize that Reid not infrequently speaks of "evidence" (the abstract noun corresponding to the adjective "evident"). See especially Chapter 20 of Essay II, "Of the Evidence of Sense, and Belief in General." There, and elsewhere, he speaks of our basic cognitive faculties as sources of "evidence."

> The common occasions of life lead us to distinguish evidence into different kinds, to which we give names that are well understood; such as the evidence of sense, the evidence of memory, the evidence of consciousness, the evidence of testimony, the evidence of axioms, the evidence of reasoning. All men of common understanding agree, that each of these kinds of evidence may afford just ground of belief ....[11]

Such passages as these may encourage those familiar with, e.g., Chisholm

to suppose that the basic epistemological story for Reid is the way in which various sources of belief confer "evidence," in a sense of that term in which it is not logically tied to reliability. But, as we have noted, such anticipations are not borne out by what actually happens when Reid formulates first principles. And, indeed, in this very chapter Reid distances himself from Chisholm by giving a psychological characterization of evidence.

> We give the name of evidence to whatever is a ground of belief.[12]
>
> I confess that, although I have, as I think, a distinct notion of the different kinds of evidence above mentioned ... yet I am not able to find any common nature to which they may all be reduced. They seem to me to agree only in this, that they are all fitted by nature to produce belief in the human mind; some of them in the highest degree, which we call certainty, others in various degrees according to circumstances.[13]

So to say that sense, memory, and so on are sources of evidence is simply to say that we are so constituted that they produce beliefs in us. Hence the fact that they are sources of evidence is not of crucial epistemological significance.

In the chapter under discussion and elsewhere Reid does speak of "good" evidence as furnishing a "just" ground of belief, and here he would seem to be using normative or evaluative notions.

> I shall take it for granted for the evidence of sense, when the proper circumstances concur, is good evidence and a just ground of belief.
>
> All good evidence is commonly called reasonable evidence, and very justly, because it ought to govern our belief as reasonable creatures.[14]

And there is an isolated passage in which Reid hints at what might be a normative conception of evidence.

> I think, in most cases, we measure the degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding.[15]

This might suggest an "ideal subject" conception of evidence, but I am not aware that this suggestion was ever developed by Reid. In any event, although Reid does undoubtedly speak in normative terms of the reasonableness of belief, the fact remains that it is the reliability of our cognitive faculties that is at the center of his concern.

III

Reid's defense of his first principles is a major component of his response to skepticism. It is by no means the whole of the response, nor is it even the only perennially important part. The skeptic Reid was primarily concerned to answer was Hume, and a large part of the critique of Hume is an attack on the "theory of ideas" on which Humean skepticism is based. This attack is concentrated on two theses. (1) The only immediate objects of cognition are "ideas in the mind." (2) We can conceive nothing but ideas and what is like ideas. Reid saw that these principles, which were by no means confined to Hume, were the foundation of Hume's skepticism; and his attack on those principles constitute a major contribution to epistemology and the philosophy of mind. But in this paper I am concentrating on the more positive part of Reid's response to skepticism, his construction of an alternative epistemology. Or rather I am concentrating on a fundamental part of that construction. This part of the story goes beyond the task of answering a skeptic that argues from Humean premises. Even if the "theory of ideas" is disposed of, we are still left with the question of what can be said as to the reliability of, e.g., sense perception.

So what does Reid have to say in defense of the likes of I.? Let's begin with the suggestion that I., along with other first principles, is *self-evident*. It may seem surprising that someone in the latter part of the eighteenth century would make such a claim, but Reid unquestionably uses that language. Indeed, the category of first principles is introduced, in the *Essays*, precisely as those judgments that are self-evident.

> ... there are other propositions which are no sooner understood than they are believed. The judgment follows the apprehension of them necessarily, and both are equally the work of nature, and the result of our original powers. There is no searching for evidence; no weighing of arguments; the proposition is not deduced or inferred from another; it has the light of truth in itself, and has no occasion to borrow it from another.
>
> Propositions of the last kind, when they are used in matters of science, have commonly been called *axioms*; and on whatever occasion they are used, are called *first principles, principles of common sense, common notions, self-evident truths*.[16]

But how can it seriously be claimed that principles like I. are self-evident? Can we really see them to be true just by understanding their content? If so, how can we explain the tortured history of the epistemology of perception? If we follow the details of Reid's discussion of I., and similar principles, we will find that his attribution of self-evidence stems from a failure to make two crucial distinctions.

First, there is the distinction between the general principles and the particular beliefs that fall within its scope. When discussing the "self-evidence" of principles like I., Reid tends to divert the discussion to the latter. Thus, in discussing the reliability of "consciousness" (the awareness of ones own current conscious states), he says:

> When a man is conscious of pain, he is certain of its existence; when he is conscious that he doubts, or believes, he is certain of the existence of those operations.
>
> But the irresistible conviction he has of the reality of those operations is not the effect of reasoning; it is immediate and intuitive.[17]

What is claimed here to be intuitively evident is not the general prin-

ciples, "consciousness is reliable," but rather particular propositions about ones conscious states and operations like "I am doubting." Again:

> ... the testimony of memory, like that of consciousness, is immediate; it claims our assent upon its own authority.[18]

What is said here to be immediately evident is something remembered, not a general principle concerning the reliability of memory. And in discussing the reliability of sense-perception Reid says:

> It is too evident to need proof, that all men are by nature led to give implicit faith to the distinct testimony of their senses, long before they are capable of any bias from prejudice of education or of philosophy.[19]

The second confusion is between self-evident (evident on merely understanding the proposition), and immediately (directly) evident, evident not on the basis of support from other propositions believed or known. The latter is the genus, of which self-evidence, properly so called, is one species. A directly evident proposition may require more for its evidence than being understood; it may be evident only in the context of a certain experience, or certain circumstances. So long as something other than support by another known or believed proposition is what renders it evident, it can be called "immediately evident." Once we get this straight, it is clear that particular perceptual and memory propositions, if directly evident at all, do not belong to the *self-evident* species of that genus. The proposition "there is a tree in front of me" is not evident to me just by virtue of my understanding it. I now understand it perfectly: yet it is not presently evident to me. It is evident to me only when I am undergoing a certain kind of sensory experience. Reid understood this well enough in practice,[20] but his sloppy use of "self-evident" prevented his pronouncements from fully reflecting that practice.

Reid does, in effect, respond to my first charge of confusion by recognizing that a first principle is often such "that in most men it produces its effect without ever being attended to, or made an object of thought,"[21] and that "many first principles ... force assent in particular instances, more powerfully than when they are turned into a general proposition."[22] This suggests that the evidence of a general principle like I. *consists* of the evidence of its particular instances, that in taking various particular perceptual propositions to be directly evident, I am thereby taking I. to be directly evident. I do not believe that this latter claim can be made out. Even if, in *accepting* particular perceptual propositions I am thereby implicitly *accepting* some principle like I., it does not follow that the general principle enjoys the same epistemic status as the particular instances.[23] On the contrary, whereas "There is a tree in front of me" is evident *if* I am having a certain sensory experience, the evidence of I. could hardly hang on my having a tree-like sensory presentation. But even if such a transfer were possible, Reid's thesis would still run afoul of the second confusion. For even if I. enjoys the same status as "There is a tree in front of me," that status is not self-evidence.

Moreover, even if I. were self-evident, as Reid understands that term, that would not suffice as a defence of the principle against its detractors. We have already seen that Reid gives a psychological account of evidence as "whatever is a ground of belief." A proposition is self-evident, then, when it contains within itself the ground of its acceptance, or, to speak more plainly, when "the judgment follows the apprehension ... necessarily."[24] Thus to say that I., or any other principle, is self-evident in this sense is just to say that we are so constituted that considering the principle will lead us to believe it. And this will cut no ice with a skeptic like Hume of the *Treatise*, who is casting doubt on the veracity of our natural principles of belief.

IV

Let's turn next to that aspect of Reid's treatment of first principles that has attracted the most attention and has dominated the popular image of his thought —the adducing of such considerations as general agreement. The most widespread impression of Reid's "common-sense philosophy" is that it consists in simply endorsing those principles that are generally accepted by the common man, and supposing that this settles this matter. Kant helped to fix this impression of Reid when he wrote, in his *Prolegomena*, of Reid, Oswald, Beattie, and Priestley:

> They found a more convenient method of being defiant without any insight, namely the appeal to *common sense*. It is indeed a great gift of God to possess right or (as they now call it) plain common sense. But this common sense must be shown in action by well-considered and reasonable thought and words, not by appealing to it as an oracle when no rational justification for one's position can be advanced. To appeal to common sense when insight and science fail, and no sooner—this is one of the subtile discoveries of modern times, by means of which the most superficial ranter can safely enter the lists with the most thorough thinker and hold his own .... Seen clearly, it is but an appeal to the opinion of the multitude, of whose applause the philosopher is ashamed, while the popular charlatan glories and boasts in it.[25]

There is no doubt that Reid did take general agreement to be some sort of recommendation of first principles. Indeed, this is only one of a number of such recommendations given by Reid. Here is one way of organizing them.

A. Universal agreement (especially in practice).[26]
   1. This is reflected in the structure of language.[27]

B. Irresistibility (at least in practice).[28]
   1. Normally no need is felt for proof (apart from philosophical prejudices).[29]
   2. Those who deny them in words are considered mad, or something approximating to that.[30]

C. Indispensable in the conduct of life, including the intellectual life.[31]

D. Belief in them is determined by our nature.[32]
   1. Other explanations, from reasoning, experience, education, or prejudice, fail.[33]
   2. We accept these principles, at least in practice, too early for them to be explainable in any of the ways mentioned under A.[34]

I shall refer to items on this list as "marks" (of first principles).

Just what sort of support did Reid suppose these marks to give to first principles? Indications for different and incompatible answers can be found in Reid's works. Perhaps he was not clear in his own mind on this point. For the moment I want to consider the possibility that Reid supposed these marks to constitute adequate reasons for judging these principles to be true. There is no doubt but that Reid does sometimes talk this way.

> ... for first principles no other reason can be given but this, that, by the constitution of our nature, we are under a necessity of assenting to them.[35]
>
> We ought ... to take for granted, as first principles, things wherein we find a *universal agreement*, among the learned and unlearned, in the different nations and ages of the world. A consent of ages and nations, of the learned and vulgar, ought, at least, to have great authority, unless we can show some prejudice, as universal as that consent is, which might be the cause of it .... There are many truths so obvious to the human faculties, that it may be expected that men should universally agree in them. And this is actually found to be the case with regard to many truths .... Where there is such universal consent in things not deep nor intricate, but which lie, as it were, on the surface, there is the greatest presumption that can be, that it is the natural result of the human faculties; and it must have great authority with every sober mind that loves truth.[36]
>
> In a matter of common sense, every man is no less a competent judge, than a mathematician is in a mathematical demonstration; and there must be a great presumption that the judgment of mankind, in such a matter, is the natural issue of those faculties which God has given them. Such a judgment can be erroneous only when there is some cause of the error, as general as the error is: when this can be shown to be the case, I acknowledge it ought to have its due weight. But to suppose a general deviation from truth among mankind in things self-evident, of which no cause can be assigned, is highly unreasonable.[37]

And yet the supposition that these marks establish the truth of first principles is open to grave objections, both with respect to the connection between premise and conclusion, and with respect to the status of the premise.

It is first that has drawn the most critical fire. Why should we suppose that a principle is shown to be true by the fact that it is universally accepted in practice, or that this universal agreement is based on our constitution? What can we infer about the nature of reality from our innate cognitive tendencies? Might we not be innately programmed to produce falsehoods, or at least beliefs that are not quite true, however

useful they may be in practice? Do these considerations add up to a solid rational support for principles like I.?

The second difficulty, concerning the alleged supporting facts themselves, has not, to my knowledge, been mentioned in discussions of Reid. It concerns an apparent circularity in the argument, at least in the argument to epistemic principles. Let's think of our marks as adduced in support of I., the thesis that sense-perception is reliable. Now how do we know that the items in question obtain? How do we know that everyone accepts I. in practice? How do we know that this acceptance is indispensable for the conduct of life, or that this acceptance is determined by an innate disposition? On the basis of sense-perception, at least in large part. It is only by observing human behavior that we have reason for supposing that everyone accepts I. in practice. It is only from our experience (mostly sense-experience) of unsuccessful endeavors that we have learned that reliance on sense-perception is indispensable for the conduct of life. In other words we have to accept I., in practice, in order to establish the premises we are using in our argument for the truth of I. This is not exactly logical circularity. I. does not appear as a premise in the argument. It is what might be called "epistemic circularity." The point is that in supposing ourselves to know the premises, or to be entitled to assert them and to use them as premises, we are presupposing the truth of I. It is, we might say, an essential *epistemic* presupposition of the argument. And so it would seem to vitiate the argument as surely as logical circularity. Unless I. is true I have no basis for accepting the premises; and so I have an argument for I., or at least an argument of this sort, only by assuming the truth of I.[38]

This second difficulty is much the more serious of the two. Apart from the second, the first difficulty can be considerably mitigated. After all, we do have considerable reason for supposing that beliefs determined by our nature, and hence found universally distributed among mankind, are mostly true. There will be controversy as to the exact character of these reasons. From a theistic perspective there is the point that God would not have endowed us with untrustworthy native faculties. And from an evolutionary perspective there is the point that the human species would not have survived had not our innate belief-dispositions yielded (by and large) accurate information about the environment. But epistemic circularity makes itself felt here too. How do we know about the conditions of the survival of species or about the way God can be expected to act? Could we have that knowledge without reliance on sense-perception? It would seem not. And so epistemic circularity is the real sticking point in the first difficulty as well.

We can conclude that *if* Reid means to be using these marks to argue for the truth of epistemic first principles, he is in trouble. But there are strong indications that this was not his most considered intention. For one thing, he explicitly recognizes the epistemic circularity we have pointed out. In fact, Reid stresses this point perhaps more than any other

philosopher prior to the twentieth century, and we shall shortly be suggesting that his most valuable contribution to our topic stems from that emphasis. This consideration alone should make us wary of attributing to him an argument, indeed a central argument, that suffers from just that defect. But more directly to the point, despite the passages cited earlier, Reid, in his most considered utterances on the subject, explicitly disavows any intention of constructing such arguments, and gives a different role to the marks.

> There are ways by which the evidence of first principles may be made more apparent when they are brought into dispute; but they require to be handled in a way peculiar to themselves. Their evidence is not demonstrative, but intuitive. They require not proof, but to be placed in a proper point of view.[39]
>
> ... although it is contrary to the nature of first principles to admit of direct, or *apodictical* proof; yet there are certain ways of reasoning even about them, by which those that are just and solid may be confirmed, and those that are false may be detected.[40]

The last passage is followed by a discussion of various marks including universal agreement, determination by our nature, and necessity for the conduct of life.

To be sure, in the background of these passages is the view that first principles are self-evident. It is because first principles are self-evident that they stand in no need of proof, but only need to be exhibited clearly. And we have seen that claim to be in serious trouble itself. Moreover it is not at all clear just exactly what function Reid is assigning the marks. If we suppose that they "confirm those that are just and solid" and "detect those that are false," are we not still saddled with epistemic circularity? Nevertheless these and other passages do make it clear that Reid took the marks to have a secondary, supporting role.[41]

V

We will return to the question of just what role can reasonably be assigned to the marks. But now I want to reopen the question of the main support of these principles, to which the appeal to the marks is secondary. We have already seen that the dominant answer to this question in Reid is an unsatisfactory one, viz., that the principles are self-evident. Nevertheless, Reid's thought contains at least the germ of a different answer, one I shall now proceed to develop. It is this line of thought that I find the most exciting perspective on epistemic first principles to emerge from Reid (emerge, admittedly, with a significant boost from the midwife).

Earlier I noted that Reid recognizes, and even insists on, the epistemic circularity involved in any direct argument for the reliability of our faculties. In commenting on Descartes' version of such an argument, he writes:

> It is strange that so acute a reasoner did not perceive, that in this reasoning there is evidently a begging of the question.
>
> For if our faculties be fallacious, why may they not deceive us in this reasoning as well as in others? And if they are to be trusted in this instance without a voucher, why not in others?
>
> Every kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties, amounts to no more than taking their own testimony for their veracity; and this we must do implicitly, until God gives us new faculties to sit in judgment upon the old; and the reason why Descartes satisfied himself with so weak an argument for the truth of his faculties, most probably was, that he never seriously doubted of it.[42]

Of course we fall into epistemic circularity only when we assume the veracity of the very faculty we are seeking to validate. The above statement leaves open the possibility that one could establish the veracity of, e.g., perception, by exclusive reliance on other faculties. Reid takes it to have been established by Hume that this cannot be done, but that still leaves various arguments for other faculties to be explored. For present purposes let's assume, with Reid, that it is impossible to establish the veracity of any of the following faculties without epistemic circularity: apprehension of self-evident truths, consciousness of ones own mental states and operations, deductive reasoning, sense-perception, memory.[43] As far as epistemic first principles are concerned, this impossibility is the root of the earlier noted thesis that first principles "do not admit of direct proof" and of the allied thesis that they are "the foundation of all reasoning."[44]

Reid followed out the implications of this circularity point more resolutely than any other seventeenth or eighteenth century philosopher, and perhaps more than any prominent philosopher since. It is implied in his key "undue partiality" argument against the Humean skeptic.

> The author of the "Treatise of Human Nature" appears to me to be but a half-skeptic. He hath not followed his principles so far as they lead him; but, after having, with unparalleled intrepidity and success, combated vulgar prejudices, when he had but one blow to strike, his courage fails him, he fairly lays down his arms, and yields himself a captive to the most common of all vulgar prejudices—I mean the belief of the existence of his own impressions and ideas.
>
> I beg, therefore, to have the honour of making an addition to the skeptical system, without which I conceive it cannot hang together. I affirm, that the belief of the existence of impressions and ideas, is as little supported by reason, as that of the existence of minds and bodies. No man ever did or could offer any reason for this belief. Descartes took it for granted, that he thought, and had sensations and ideas; so have all his followers done. Even the hero of skepticism hath yielded this point, I crave leave to say, weakly, and imprudently ... what is there in impressions and ideas so formidable, that this all-conquering philosophy, after triumphing over every other existence, should pay homage to them? Besides, the concession is dangerous: for belief is of such a nature, that, if you leave any root, it will spread; and you may more easily put it up altogether, than say, Hitherto shalt thou go and no further: the existence of impressions and ideas I give up to thee; but see thou pretend to nothing more. A thorough and consistent skeptic

will never, therefore, yield this point;

> To such a skeptic I have nothing to say; but of the semiskeptic, I should beg to know, why they believe the existence of their impressions and ideas. The true reason I take to be, because they cannot help it; and the same reason will lead them to believe many other things.[45]

> The skeptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive? This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion. Reason, says the skeptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception?—they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another.[46]

If the skeptic complains that no adequate reasons can be given for the reliability of sense perception, we can respond that the circularity point shows that the same is to be said for whatever faculties he favors, whatever faculties he exempts from critical scrutiny. If, as in the first passage, we are dealing with a skeptic who raises no doubts about "consciousness," we can ask him where one would turn if one were to try to show, without relying on the deliverances of consciousness, that it is a reliable guide to ones own mental states. The reliability of consciousness is not a self-evident truth. Reasoning based on observable facts will never show that Jones' mental states are really what he is directly aware of them as being.[47] And even if we could justify reliance on consciousness by appeal to rational intuition, sense-perception, and/or reasoning, we would then be faced with questions about the credentials of those faculties. If, as in the second passage, we are dealing with a skeptic who raises no questions about "reason," i.e., the faculty of drawing deductive inferences, it is completely obvious that no non-circular justification of this faculty is possible. How could one give an argument for the reliability of reason, without relying on ones capacity to draw valid inferences?

Thus the skeptic about sense-perception is faced with a dilemma. The first horn is the withholding of credence from all cognitive faculties. "To such a skeptic I have nothing to say ...."[48] There can be no rational discourse with such a skeptic, for he has renounced any ground he might have for making a contribution to the discussion. Since he cannot, consistent with his abstention, make any claim at all, he has nothing to say to us; and by the same token he is debarred from crediting anything we say. The second horn involves a selection among basic sources of belief: accepting some and demanding a justification for others. But then the circularity point shows this to be a groundless selectivity. Since epistemic circularity infects all attempts to demonstrate the reliability of a basic ground of belief, there is no rational basis for accepting some and not others without justification. In either case the skeptic is in an untenable position.

So much for the skeptic. But does any positive position on epistemic

principles emerge from these considerations? Indeed there does. In fact, a positive position is implicit in the dismissal of the skeptic. The dilemmatic argument just presented is not just a way of silencing the skeptic. It is a revelation of our epistemic situation as human beings; it lays bare our "epistemic condition." It points up the way in which our situation in the world—our powers in correlation with the way things are—renders vain the aspiration to accept beliefs only from those sources the reliability of which can be rationally justified. What these considerations show is that this noble sounding aspiration is based on a thoroughly unrealistic assessment of our situation, and even on an overweening pride unsuited to our creaturely status. Our proper place in the scheme of things is rather to accept with thankfulness the native belief-forming tendencies with which we have been endowed by our creator, using them for the purposes for which they were intended, not presuming to sit in judgment over them, an office reserved for their maker. Reid often waxes eloquent on this theme.

> It would be agreeable to fly to the moon, and to make a visit to Jupiter and Saturn; but, when I know that Nature has bound me down by the law of gravitation to this planet which I inhabit, I rest contented, and quietly suffer myself to be carried along in its orbit. My belief is carried along by perception, as irresistibly as my body by the earth.
>
> ...
>
> If Nature intended to deceive me, and impose upon me by false appearances, and I, by my great cunning and profound logic, have discovered the imposture, prudence would dictate to me, in this case, even to put up with this indignity done me, as quietly as I could, and not to call her an impostor to her face, lest she should be even with me in another way.[49]

> That our sensations of touch indicate something external, extended, figured, hard or soft, is not a deduction of reason, but a natural principle. The belief of it, and the very conception of it, are equally parts of our constitution. If we are deceived in it, we are deceived by Him that made us, and there is no remedy.[50]

> We cannot give a reason why we believe even our sensations to be real and not fallacious; why we believe what we are conscious of; why we trust any of our natural faculties. We say, it must be so, it cannot be otherwise. This expresses only a strong belief, which is indeed the voice of nature, and which therefore in vain we attempt to resist. But if, in spite of nature, we resolve to go deeper, and not to trust our faculties, without a reason to show that they cannot be fallacious; I am afraid, that seeking to become wise, and to be as gods, we shall become foolish, and being unsatisfied with the lot of humanity, we shall throw off common sense.[51]

These remarks naturally suggest an elaboration in the spirit of C. S. Peirce, a philosopher influenced by Reid. What the circularity thesis shows is that there is no possibility of establishing either the reliability or the unreliability of our basic cognitive faculties. This means that there is, as we might say, no *theoretical* problem as to their reliability; i.e., there is no such theoretical problem for *us*, none to which we can address

ourselves. The most we have is a practical problem. Given that the situation is as just stated, should we trust our basic cognitive faculties? Just what practical problem we are faced with depends on what it is with respect to which we have a choice. Reid thinks that we have no real choice as to whether to *believe* the output of our consciousness, senses, memory, reasoning, etc. But even if that is so, we may still have a choice as to what attitude to take toward this situation, whether to accept it gladly, willingly, thankfully, or to be dragged along surlily and reluctantly. Whatever the exact scope of the practical problem, Reid's position would be that there can be no sufficient reason for refusing to acquiesce gladly in our native tendencies. Why should we not endorse what is bestowed on us by our nature? What reason could we have for churlishly resisting their blandishments? Is it that we cannot prove that the faculties are reliable? But once we see that this is, in the nature of the case, impossible, this consideration should lose its force. Since we can see that this is beyond our powers, *even if the faculties are perfectly reliable*, the absence of such proof should not be taken as a reason for suspicion. Our native tendencies have everything going for them and nothing of substance going against them. There is only one choice open to the wise and prudent.

VI

Thus Reid's most distinctive and important point about fundamental epistemic principles is a negative one, together with the appropriate implications thereof. Situated as we are, it is a vain hope to think that we could give a non-circular rational justification of the reliability, or unreliability, of our basic cognitive faculties. Just because they are basic, they constitute an indispensable access to the facts we need to make a judgment on the issue. That being our situation, there is no reasonable alternative to our simply following the promptings of our nature and unreservedly giving credence to the output of these faculties, except where we have sufficient reasons from other outputs to reject a particular item. The suggestion that the lack of a rational justification for, e.g., sense-perception, is a ground for doubting perceptual judgments, can be seen to be spurious once we realize that such a justification would still be impossible even if perception is as reliable as you please.[52]

We are now at last in a position to specify a defensible role for the "marks." By trusting our faculties we not only amass an indefinite quantity of information about a variety of other matters; we can also learn that these faculties are native endowments, that all normal persons rely on them, at least in practice, and that their use is indispensable for the conduct of life. To be sure, this does not constitute a proof of reliability; we assume their reliability in acquiring the premises of the "proof." But this does help to reinforce the conclusion that there is no rationally superior alternative to acquiescing in our native belief-tendencies. Not

only is there no significant reason to doubt them; in addition, they confirm their own claims. That is, by trusting them, we discover specific reasons for doing so; our faculties prove to be self-confirming, rather than self-refuting. And this is no trivial point. It is conceivable that the use of our faculties should reveal reasons for distrusting them. It is conceivable that I should remember discovering truths that imply that memory is fallacious. It is conceivable that an empirical science of sense-perception should reveal that our perceptual beliefs do not proceed in any regular way from the facts believed. But it is not so. Their testimony is such as to support their claims to credence. Although this does not constitute an adequate argument for a judgment of reliability, it at least avoids a possible argument for unreliability.

Thus what Reid teaches us about the foundations of epistemology is that there is no rationally attractive alternative to accepting the testimony of our basic cognitive faculties as (prima facie) correct, and that only if we do this will we ever have any chance to acquire any knowledge whatever.[53]

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NOTES

1. See sect. III.
2. *Ess.* I, 2, p. 34, Cf. VI, 5, p. 617.
3. *Ess.* VI., 5, p. 622.
4. *Ess.* VI, 5, p. 625.
5. *Ess.* I, 2, p. 34.
6. *Ess.* p. 630.
7. *Ess.* I., 2, p. 38.
8. *Ess.* p. 39.
9. *Ess.*, I., 2, p. 40.
10. *Ess.*, II, 20, p. 292.
11. *Ess.*, II, 20, p. 291.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 291-2.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
15. *Ess.*, VII., 3, p. 731.
16. *Ess.*, VI., 4, p. 593.
17. *Ess.*, VI., 5, p. 617.
18. *Ess.*, VI, 5, p. 622.
19. *Ess.*, VI, 5, p. 625.
20. And sometimes in profession as well.

    Shall we say then that the evidence of sense is the same with that of axioms, or

> self-evident truths? ... I would observe that the word *axiom* is taken by philosophers in such a sense, as that the existence of the objects of sense cannot, with propriety, be called an axiom. If the word *axiom* be put to signify every truth which is known immediately, without being deduced from any antecedent truth, then the existence of the objects of sense may be called an axiom. For my senses give me as immediate conviction of what they testify, as my understanding gives me of what is commonly called an axiom. (*Ess.*, pp. 293-4)

It must be confessed that the reason adduced by Reid for not regarding the existence of objects of sense as self-evident is not the one I gave above. His point rather is that "axioms" are necessary truths, true at all times and places. (*Loc. cit.*)

21. *Ess.*, VI, 5, p. 632.

22. *Ess.*, VI, 5. p. 633.

23. For a discussion of the "level confusion" involved in the contrary supposition see my "Two Types of Foundationalism," *Journ. Philos.*, Vol. LXXIII, no. 7, April 8, 1976, pp. 165-185; and my "Level Confusions in Epistemology," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. V (1980), pp. 135-150.

24. *Ess.*, VI, 4, p. 593.

25. Immanuel Kant. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, ed. by Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1950), p. 7.

26. *Ess.*, I, 2, p. 30; II, 20, p. 291; VI, 4, pp. 608-13. (With respect to all the items on this list, the references given are only a small selection from the many passages dealing with them).

27. *Ess.*, I, 2. pp. 37, 39. VI., 4, p. 612.

28. *Inq.*, II, 7, pp. 37-8, V, 7, p. 78; VI, 20, p. 208. *Ess.*, I, 2, pp. 34-5; II, 5, p. 113; II, 15, p. 240; VI, 1, p. 540; VI, 4, p. 593; VI, 5, p. 617.

29. *Ess.*, I, 2, p. 30; II, 20, pp. 292-3; VI, 5, p. 622.

30. *Ess.*, I, 2, p. 31; II, 20, pp. 296-7.

31. *Inq.*, II, 6, p. 32. *Ess.*, I, 2, pp. 30, 32-3; VI, 1, p. 541; VI, 4, p. 613; VI, 5, pp. 635, 640, 642.

32. *Inq.*, II, 6, p. 32: II, 7, pp. 37-8; V, 7, p. 82. *Ess.*, II, 20, pp. 292, 287; VI, 1, p. 540; VI, 4, pp. 593, 594; VI, 5, pp. 621, 625, 633.

33. *Inq.*, II, 7, p. 37.

34. *Ess.*, VI, 4, p. 613.

35. *Inq.*, V, 7, p. 82.

36. *Ess.*, I, 2, p. 38.

37. *Ess.*, VI, 4, p. 611.

38. This circularity point holds only against arguments from these premises to epistemic first principles concerning the reliability of our cognitive faculties. Furthermore the point has to be established separately for each such principle. If, e.g., one could establish the relevant premises without assuming the reliability of *memory*, then the parallel argument for the reliability of memory would not be subject to epistemic circularity. I believe that epistemic circularity does infect all otherwise not implausible attempts to argue for the reliability of basic cognitive faculties; but I will not be able to go into that in this paper.

39. *Ess.*, I, 2, p. 33.

40. *Ess.*, VI, 4, p. 607.

41. In this connection it is worthy of note that, when in discussing particular principles

Reid appeals to agreement or innateness, he often uses this appeal to support not the assertion of the principle, or a claim to its truth, but rather the claim that it is a genuine first principle. Here are a few such passages from Essay VI, Ch. 5, "The First Principles of Contingent Truths":

> As therefore the real existence of our thoughts, and of all the operations and feelings of our own minds, is believed by all men; as we find ourselves incapable of doubting it, and as incapable of offering any proof of it, it may justly be considered as a first principle, or dictate of common sense. (619)

> This has one of the surest marks of a first principle; for no man ever pretended to prove it, and yet no man in his wits calls it in question .... (p. 622)

> ... as this belief is universal among mankind, and is not grounded upon any antecedent reasoning, but upon the constitution of the mind itself, it must be acknowledged to be a first principle, in the sense in which I use that word. (643)

42. *Ess.*, VI, 5, p. 631.

43. Note that if I., e.g., were really self-evident in the strict sense, this would amount to establishing the reliability of sense-perception by exclusive reliance on another faculty, the apprehension of self-evident truths.

44. See e.g., *Inq.* V, 7; *Ess.* I, 2, p. 31, and esp. VI, 4, pp. 596-7. This thesis is also subject to various qualifications. Not every first principle will be at the foundation of every piece of reasoning.

45. *Inq.*, V, 7, pp. 81-2. The reference to impressions and ideas is a red herring, from the standpoint of our present concerns. Reid denied the existence of impressions and ideas, as these were understood by Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. In fact that denial was the centerpiece of his attack on their philosophy. But the chief point of this passage is quite different. Here Reid's concern is to point out that no one has any more *reason* for accepting the deliverances of "consciousness" respecting ones own mental states, than one does for accepting the deliverances of perception concerning the physical environment. The deliverances of consciousness are expressed in terms of "impressions" and "ideas" just because that is the way Hume *et al* were thinking of them.

46. *Inq.*, VI, 20, p. 207.

47. Reid was spared the necessity of dealing with the unfortunate behaviorist thesis that there is an effective external check on "consciousness," since mental states can be construed in terms of dispositions to overt behavior.

48. "If a skeptic should build his skepticism upon this foundation, that all our reasoning, and judging powers are fallacious in their nature, or should resolve at least to withhold assent until it be proved that they are not; it would be impossible by argument to beat him out of his strong hold, and he must even be left to enjoy his skepticism." (*Ess.*, VI, 5, pp. 630-1)

49. *Inq.*, VI, 20, p. 208.

50. *Inq.*, V, 7, p. 82.

51. *Ess.*, VI, 6, p. 652.

52. The position developed in these last two sections stands in rather a sharp contrast with the Reidian view that first principles are self-evident. And indeed, as pointed out earlier, if they were self-evident, the reliability of all our basic faculties except rational intuition could be established in a non-circular manner. So the claim of self-evidence conflicts not just with my version of Reid's position in this last section, but with the circularity thesis, something that is obviously central to Reid's perspective on epistemol-

ogy. It is noteworthy that the passages I cited in support of my final interpretation are mostly from the *Inquiry*, while the claims for self-evidence come from the *Essays*. It may be that when Reid came, in the *Essays*, to present his position in a more systematic, positive manner, he was thereby led to regard first principles themselves as falling within the province of a particular faculty, a view that, as I have just suggested, betrays some of his most valuable insights.

53. This paper was presented at the 1983 Wheaton Conference in Philosophy. It has profited from comments by Jonathan Bennett, Alvin Plantinga, and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

REFERENCES

The following works will be referred to with the indicated abbreviations.

Inq. Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry Into the Human Mind*, ed. by Timothy Duggan, Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1970.

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POLITICS AND ANTI-POLITICS: NIETZSCHE'S VIEW OF THE STATE

Lester H. Hunt

> The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary. The wise man is the State. He needs no army, fort, or navy,—he loves men too well .... He needs ... no church, for he is a prophet; no statute book, for he is the law-giver; ... no experience, for the life of the creator shoots through him and looks from his eyes.
>
> *Emerson, "Politics"*

IN recent years, a number of scholars have argued that Nietzsche held political views which would require the state to possess enormous powers, powers so great that, if they are right, it would be quite reasonable to describe his views as "totalitarian."[1] The passages in Nietzsche's writings which at least seem to support this sort of interpretation are numerous and, in many cases, very familiar to Nietzsche's readers.

However, Nietzsche makes other statements, many of them less well known, which could easily lead to the opposite sort of interpretation. In an early aphorism, for instance, he describes a particularly individualist kind of stateless society and his ambiguous remarks about it might well be understood as being favorable. Discussing the future of democratic societies after the collapse of religion, he confidently predicts that as the chaos of factional disputes grows worse and worse, people will become more mistrustful of all government, leading, as he puts it in mock-Hegelian language, "to the superseding of the concept of the state, the transcending of the antithesis between private and public." "Step by step, private organizations draw the business of the state into themselves: even the stickiest residue which from the ancient work of the state remains behind (that activity, for instance, which protects one private person from another) is taken care of by private entrepreneurs." He comments that, when this has been accomplished, and "all relapses into the old disease have been overcome," the book of mankind will yield "all sorts of curious stories and perhaps some good ones, too" (MAM 472).[2] Not surprisingly, it has been suggested that Nietzsche was in fact an anarchist, that he believed that we ought to abolish the state altogether.[3] Walter Kaufmann defended the view—which at least on the surface seems similar to this one—that Nietzsche's attitudes were deeply "anti-political."[4]