

KEITH DEROSE

It appears as evident that this connection between our sensation and the conception and belief of external existences cannot be produced by habit, experience, education, or any principle of human nature that hath been admitted by philosophers (*Inquiry*, V, 3, p. 122b).

Reid then concludes that we should accept the connection between the sensation and the conception and belief of external existences as an "original principle of our constitution":

What shall we say, then, of this conception, and this belief, which are so unaccountable and untractable? I see nothing left, but to conclude, that, by an original principle of our constitution, a certain sensation of touch both suggests to the mind the conception of hardness, and creates the belief of it: or, in other words, that this sensation is a natural sign of hardness (*Inquiry*, V, 2, p. 121a–b).

Reid does not have all that much to say about what he means by calling something an "original principle of our constitution." (It is important to note that, in Reid's terminology, an "original principle of our constitution" is not the same thing as a "first principle" or a "principle of common sense.") But at least part of what he means is that to reach an "original principle" is to reach the end of explanation; Reid writes of "original principles of his [a man's] constitution, of which no account can be given but the will of our Maker," and he says that reaching such original principles constitutes "an analysis of the human faculties" (*Inquiry*, I, 2, p. 99a–b). Thus, to say that a certain type of tactile sensation suggests to us the existence of a hard body by an original principle of our constitution is to say that we are just set up in such a way that the sensation creates the conception of and belief in the existence of a hard body, and that no further reason can be given for why there is such a connection, except perhaps that God willed it to be so. And it seems plausible to suppose that this suggestion is an original principle of our constitution *if* we, like Reid, think of the sensation as being completely unlike the quality of body it suggests.

B. *The Argument for Trust.* If Reid is right, if we are disposed by our constitution to form beliefs in the existence of material¹⁶ ob-

¹⁶Reid assumes that if he can establish the existence of bodies distinct from our sensations and which are not like sensations, then he can take

jects with certain qualities upon the occasions of having certain sensations, then are these beliefs justified? Reid writes:

The sceptic 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 super-scription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion (*Inquiry*, VI, 20, p. 183b).

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Reid seems to be making the plausible claim that since he came by his belief innocently and naturally, he is justified in holding to it; presumption is on his side. The belief is already there, and he is not responsible for it being there, so a reason must be given why he should give up his belief. The situation would be different if he had arrived at his belief by means of an inference; but, Reid is claiming, his belief is the immediate result of his nature.

Perhaps, it may be claimed, the man on the street is somehow justified in believing in the existence of material objects for the reason Reid gives above: he just naturally finds himself holding this belief. But if Reid is presenting realism with regard to material objects as a philosophical thesis, should he not worry about the question of whether this belief that his constitution leads him to form is true? After all, as Reid would admit, it is not impossible for a creature to have a constitution that led him to have systematically false perceptual beliefs.¹⁷ How do we know that we are not such creatures? Perhaps Reid, *as a philosopher*, should not be so quick to take this belief “upon trust and without suspicion.” Norman Daniels raises this problem in his book, *Thomas Reid's Inquiry*,¹⁸ and claims that Reid appeals to God to escape the problem:

Reid's only defense against the skeptical outcome of his own nativism — namely, that our constitutions might lead us to systematically false

these bodies to be mind-independent, or material, objects. Reid thinks it is overwhelmingly plausible that bodies with such properties as hardness (when hardness is thought of in the proper, non-sensational way) are mind-independent (cf., for example, *Inquiry*, V, 2, p. 120a). The only reason for doubting that bodies are mind-independent, according to Reid, is sensationalism, which he attacks.

¹⁷Reid includes “That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious” (p. 447a) among the first principles of *contingent* truths discussed in *Essays*, VI, 5.

¹⁸New York, N.Y.: B. Franklin, 1974.

beliefs—is his belief that God would not deceive us . . . (p. 117).

Reid justifies natively given ‘common sense’ beliefs through a dogmatic appeal to God as a nondeceiver (pp. 119–120).

Reid would be absolutely scandalized by the claim that he justifies common sense by an appeal to God as a non-deceiver, for to do this would be to make the very same mistake of circularity that Reid accuses Descartes of making:

Des Cartes certainly made a false step in this matter, for having suggested this doubt among others—that whatever evidence he might have from his consciousness, his senses, his memory, or his reason, yet possibly some malignant being had given him those faculties on purpose to impose upon him; and, therefore, that they are not to be trusted without a proper voucher. To remove this doubt, he endeavours to prove the being of a Deity who is no deceiver; whence he concludes, that the faculties he had given him are true and worthy to be trusted.

It is strange that so acute a reasoner did not perceive that in this reasoning there is evidently a begging of the question.

For, if our faculties be fallacious, why may they not deceive us in this reasoning as well as in others? (*Essays*, VI, 5, p. 447b).

To appeal to a non-deceiving God in order to show that one’s faculties are reliable, then, is circular, according to Reid. And it is circular, presumably, whether it takes the form of a proof of God’s existence *or* if it is a dogmatic appeal, for one must still reason from the existence of a non-deceiving God to the trustworthiness of one’s faculties, and Reid writes that “*every* kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties, amounts to no more than taking their own testimony for their veracity” (*Essays*, VI, 5, p. 447b).

How, then, will Reid respond to the skeptic who raises the doubt that a given belief which is the immediate result of the human constitution might be false? Reid divides skeptics into two classes: “thorough and consistent sceptics” and “semi-sceptics” (*Inquiry*, V, 7, p. 130a). His response to the skeptic will depend on the type of skeptic he is dealing with.

p. 14.3

A thorough skeptic is a skeptic who will not trust *any* belief until the belief-forming faculty from which it is derived is shown to be reliable. Of course, *nothing* can be proven or shown until *some* belief is accepted, so a thorough skeptic (if he *is* thorough and consistent) will end up not believing *anything*. Furthermore, one cannot

prove to a thorough skeptic that he should believe anything, for there are no premises available from which to argue. Thorough skepticism is, Reid admits, invulnerable to attack:

If a sceptic should build his scepticism upon this foundation, that all our reasoning and judging powers are fallacious in their nature, or should resolve at least to withhold assent until it be proved that they are not, it would be impossible by argument to beat him out of this stronghold; and he must even be left to enjoy his scepticism (*Essays*, VI, 5, p. 447b; cf. *Inquiry*, V, 7, p. 130a).

p. 14.3

Thus, Reid gives up against the thorough skeptic: "To such a skeptic I have nothing to say" (*Inquiry*, V, 7, p. 130a).

But neither can the thorough skeptic have anything to say to Reid. The consistent skeptic will not believe *anything*; in particular, he will not believe that Reid should not believe things:

I am resolved to take my own existence, and the existence of other things, upon trust. . . . He must either be a fool, or want to make a fool of me, that would reason me out of my reason and senses.

I confess I know not what a sceptic can answer to this, nor by what good argument he can plead even for a hearing; for either his reasoning is sophistry, and so deserves contempt; or there is no truth in the human faculties—and then why should we reason? (*Inquiry*, I, 8, p. 104a).

p. 3.9-4.0

To pretend to prove by reasoning that there is no force in reason, does indeed look like a philosophical delirium. It is like a man's pretending to see clearly, that he himself and all other men are blind (*Essays*, VII, 4, p. 485a).

A consistent skeptic, then, will not trust his reason, even to reach the conclusion that he (or Reid) should not believe something. If a skeptic *does* trust his reason in this way, he is not a thorough skeptic, but a semi-skeptic.

The semi-skeptic chooses some of the sources of his beliefs to be acceptable before they are verified; all other sources must be verified by these favored sources. The "ideal system" of philosophy, for example, chooses the "principle of consciousness" ("That our thoughts, our sensations, and every thing of which we are conscious, hath a real existence") and deductive reasoning as favored sources, according to Reid (*Inquiry*, VII, p. 206b). Reid thinks that semi-skepticism of the ideal variety is psychologically impossible to

maintain (as is thorough skepticism); he points out in many places that Hume admits to being forced into believing his senses and other faculties as soon as he leaves his studies.¹⁹ But Reid's main complaint against the semi-skeptic is that his choice of favored faculties is (and must be) completely arbitrary:

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? (*Inquiry*, VI, 20, p. 183b).

p. 20.7

It seems arbitrary to Reid to pick out certain ultimate sources of belief to accept without having a reason for picking them over the other sources. And no reason can be given for *anything* until some source of belief is accepted. To escape complete arbitrariness, we must *begin* either with an attitude of trust toward all of our belief-forming faculties, or we must begin with an attitude of distrust toward all of them. To do the latter is to be a thorough skeptic, and never to have any hope of getting anywhere. Reid chooses the former course. He would admit that he puts his faith in a good God who has given him good faculties, but he would also insist that “the unjust *live by faith* as well as the *just*” (*Inquiry*, Dedication, p. 95b). Why does Reid begin with trust in the deliverances of his faculties? Because he has a choice among three options: 1) beginning with an attitude of trust toward his faculties; 2) beginning with an attitude of distrust toward his faculties; or 3) beginning by picking out certain faculties as reliable in a completely arbitrary fashion. Of these three choices, Reid finds the first to be the only option that makes sense, and the only choice he is psychologically able to follow.²⁰

p. 1.8

Of course, to begin with an attitude of trust toward a faculty does not guarantee that one will end up with that attitude. Reid

¹⁹See, for example, *Inquiry*, I, 5, p. 102a.

²⁰William P. Alston cites Reid and uses this Reidian argument for trust in his “Christian Experience and Christian Belief,” p. 119, printed in *Faith and Rationality*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). See Nicholas Wolterstorff’s “Can Belief in God be Rational If It Has No Foundations?” (from the same book) for another example of the influence of Reid’s epistemological views on contemporary religious epistemology.

argues that the faculty of perception is generally reliable. Of course, it occasionally leads us astray, but this is true of all our faculties:

Our senses, our memory, and our reason, are all limited and imperfect—this is the lot of humanity: but they are such as the Author of our being saw to be best fitted for us in our present state (*Essays*, II, 22, p. 335a).

Reid is not claiming, then, that all of our immediately formed beliefs will turn out to be true. Such beliefs, however, are only corrected by means of other beliefs which seem to be clearer or more certain. Certain perceptual beliefs, however, are among the beliefs that have the strongest hold on us; they are as irresistible and certain as even simple truths of reason:

I cannot demonstrate that two quantities which are equal to the same quantity, are equal to each other; neither can I demonstrate that the tree which I perceive, exists. But, by the constitution of my nature, my belief is irresistibly carried along by my apprehension of the axiom; and, by the constitution of my nature, my belief is no less irresistibly carried along by my perception of the tree (*Inquiry*, VI, 20, p. 185b).

It seems, then, that certain perceptual beliefs are here to stay. And, in general, when perceptual beliefs are given up, it will be on the basis of other perceptual beliefs (*Essays*, II, 22, p. 339a). Among our most certain perceptual beliefs are the beliefs we form on the occasion of having certain sensations that, for example, we are touching a hard object. We should start with an attitude of trust towards these beliefs, according to Reid, and they are too compelling to be overturned by other beliefs. Reid concludes:

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 (*Inquiry*, V, 7, p. 130a–b).

p. 14.7

We should, therefore, trust our belief that there are hard material objects.

~~C. The Importance of Reid's Anti-Sensationalism. I have shown here~~