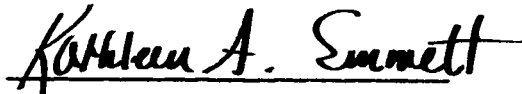


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Paul C. Boling entitled "Thomas Reid's Realism." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.


Richard Aquila, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:




Accepted for the Council:


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Thesis
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Gp. 2

THOMAS REID'S REALISM

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ABSTRACT

Problems of perception have intrigued psychologists and philosophers for many years. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, men like Berkeley, Locke, and Hume were propounding versions of an indirect theory of perception. In particular, they held to a subjectivistic version of the indirect theory. Not everyone during that period agreed with these philosophers and their conclusions regarding perception. Among these was a Scottish philosopher named Thomas Reid. He is known as the "father of common-sense philosophy," and he reacted vigorously against the indirect theory of perception and, particularly, against the theory of ideas of Berkeley and Hume. It is the intent of this thesis to examine Reid's view of perception and his opinions regarding the theory of ideas, and to attempt to come to some sort of a conclusion regarding what kind of theory of perception he advocated.

Reid believed that his major contribution to philosophy was his complete refutation of the theory of ideas, especially as it was stated by Berkeley, Locke, and Hume. The first part of the thesis is an examination of Reid's views regarding the ideal theory; one of the key parts of his refutation of the ideal theory was his refutation of the argument from illusion, which is a common argument used to defend the indirect theory of perception. So in the first chapter, I discuss Reid's answer to the argument from illusion.

After discussing the theory of ideas, I move to a discussion of Reid's own theory of perception. His presentation of his theory is

often confusing and sometimes inconsistent, so it is difficult often to come to any solid conclusions about his views. The first subject of importance in Reid's theory is his concept of sensations; he makes a very definite attempt to separate sensation from perception as two distinct and separate acts of mind. This distinction, as we will see, is not always clear, nor is it always even understandable. It does seem clear that Reid wants to advocate some form of direct realism; in other words, when we perceive the world of external objects, we perceive it, generally, just as it really is. The connection between sensation and the perception of the external world is "suggestion." This concept is not clear either, but it seems that Reid thinks of sensations as signs which "suggest" objects to us in the external world.

Following a discussion of sensation and suggestion, I discuss Reid's theory of perception and attempt to come to some conclusion regarding his version of realism. There is quite a bit of disagreement among commentators about Reid's realism. Some feel he advocates both an indirect and a direct theory of perception. After examining his view carefully, however, I have concluded that Reid's theory is definitely one of direct realism.

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INTRODUCTION

The analysis and epistemology of sense-perception have been key problems in philosophy for many years. Several main lines of approach have been taken to this study. One of these is realism. According to this view, material objects exist external to us and are independent of our sense experience. The sense in which these objects are external to us and independent of us is stronger for a realist than it is for a phenomenalist, who would also grant this fact. For a phenomenalist, an object is independent in the sense that it does not have to be perceived in order to exist. However, it is dependent in the sense that the concept of what it is to exist is defined in terms of its being perceived; in other words, under appropriate circumstances, the object in question would be perceived. For the realist, however, for an object to be independent does not just mean that it is perceivable, or that it is just an object of possible perceptions, but that it is, in fact, a real material object which is really there, apart from any actual or possible perceptions. For some realists, furthermore, when we look at the world around us, we see it, generally, as it is. Sounds, smells, and other features perceived in our experience are objective characteristics of reality. These characteristics and objects are not subjective or private in the way a dream is (contrary to the subjectivistic version of the indirect theory); they are all external to us; they are neutral between observers, and they persist in exactly the same way even when no one perceives them. This kind of realism is often called Direct, Common-Sense, or Naive Realism.

Most philosophers have tried to show or have assumed the falsity of Direct Realism and have opted for some version of an indirect theory of sense perception. According to these philosophers, in perception we are not directly or immediately aware of external physical objects. Rather, we are immediately aware of a series of sense-data, ideas, sense impressions, or sensations. This view is sometimes called Epistemological Dualism, the Subjectivist Theory, or the Ideal Theory.

According to the subjectivist version of this theory, things like sounds, tastes, smells, colors, etc., which we normally attribute to external objects and which a direct realist would say are, in most cases, real characteristics of those objects, are actually strictly private and subjective data which are numerically distinct for each person even if they are similar in character. Since these data are the sum total of our immediate knowledge and perception, we cannot directly observe the external world at all.

One of the most common arguments used to support the indirect or dualistic theory is the argument from illusion.¹ This argument is

based on the fact that material things may present different appearances to different observers, or to the same observer in different conditions, and that the character of these appearances is to some extent causally determined by the state of the conditions and the observer.²

For example, a stick which looks straight normally looks crooked when it is seen in water. The stick is actually straight, and it does not

¹See, for example, A. J. Ayer, "The Argument From Illusion," in Perception and the External World, ed. by R. J. Hirst (New York: MacMillan Co., 1965), pp. 128-134.

²Ibid., p. 128.

really change its shape when it is put in the water. Thus, at least one of the visual appearances of the stick is nonveridical; it cannot be both crooked and straight. However, even in the case where I see a crooked stick, I must be seeing something. The name given to this something (appearance) is sense-datum. Thus, a sense-datum is the object of which we are directly aware in perception, rather than a material object itself. The same thing is true in the case of a man who sees a mirage in the desert. He is not seeing any actual material thing, for the oasis he thinks he sees does not really exist. At the same time, he is having a perceptual experience with a certain content, i.e. the mirage. Thus, it is said by this theory that the man is experiencing or directly perceiving sense-data.

Now by applying a continuity argument to the foregoing, we can show that in all cases of perception, we perceive appearances (sense-data) rather than objects. Namely, in their intrinsic quality, all perceptual experiences are the same. Veridical and non-veridical perceptions "shade into one another,"³ thereby demonstrating that the objects perceived in either case are the same. Thus, if in nonveridical situations, what we perceive are sense-data, then in veridical perceptions what we perceive are also sense-data. The conclusion, then, is that what we immediately and directly perceive is always a sense datum and never a material object.

Another argument used to support the conclusion that we always perceive sense-data rather than material objects concerns itself with

³Ibid., p. 132.

causal conditions of psychological and physiological states. The argument is based on the fact that all of our perceptions are to some extent causally dependent both upon external conditions and upon our own psychological or physiological states. For example, we say a stick looks crooked because we see it in the water or a wall looks blue because we see it through blue glasses. Such causal dependencies as these are also operative in cases of veridical perception, but we do not notice them usually. For me to see anything certain conditions must be satisfied, e.g. the light must be bright enough; my eyes must function properly; there must be something there to see, etc. If these conditions are varied or omitted, the character of my perception is altered. For example, if the light is turned off, I may cease to see the object completely. On the other hand, the converse is not true. If the object is removed, I cease to see it, but the state of the light or the room may remain the same. Hence, the accompanying conditions are not causally dependent upon my perception, but my perception is causally dependent upon them. Now the existence and essential properties of material objects are supposed to be independent of an observer; in other words, they continue the same whether they are observed or not. But this, as we have just seen, is not true of the object we immediately perceive. Therefore, the conclusion is that what we immediately perceive is not a material object but, rather, a sense-datum.

There are other arguments also that are used to support the indirect theory of perception, but the two I have mentioned are sufficient for my purposes here since they are the ones that Reid is primarily concerned with. Both of these arguments can be criticized,

it seems to me. Such criticisms will comprise an important part of the thesis to follow, especially in chapter II. At this point, however, I want to point out a way a realist could respond to each argument. The argument from illusion makes a logical move which is very questionable. Recall that according to the argument, when I see a "crooked" stick in the water (a stick which is actually straight), there is something crooked that I am seeing, i.e. a sense-datum. But is this conclusion necessary or even legitimate? I do not believe it is. There is a difference between an appearance of an object and the way an object appears. Thus, the stick appears crooked, but we know that in fact it is not; it appears to be crooked because it is in the water. So that for the realist, I am seeing a stick in the water which appears crooked. With regard to the argument from causal conditions and psychological states, the realist can say, contrary to the argument, that it is not what I perceive that depends upon internal factors but it is how I perceive what I perceive that depends upon causal conditions. Namely, perceiving an object dimly, brightly, in a blurred manner, etc. can depend upon things like lighting in a room or the condition of my eyes or nerves.

The first and primary conclusion of the indirect (dualistic) theory, then, is that when we perceive an external physical object, we are immediately and directly aware only of appearances or sense-data. Now this argument can be carried further, resulting in a subjectivistic conclusion; it is necessary to understand this conclusion also because Reid is concerned with refuting both conclusions in his theory of perception. The subjectivistic conclusion requires two additional premises:

- (a) appearances constitute the way things appear to people;
- (b) appearances exist only in relation to our awareness of them; in other words, they are dependent upon awareness.

Before proceeding to the subjectivistic conclusion from these premises, I want to point out that a phenomenalist would not necessarily have any problem with the argument up to this point. Recall that for phenomenism an object does not have to be perceived in order to exist, but the concept of what it is to exist is defined in terms of its being perceived. Under appropriate circumstances, in other words, the object is perceivable or it would be perceived by an observer, and appropriate sense experiences can be described which would be sufficient to verify the actual presence of the object in question (thereby ruling out the possibility of an illusion). For phenomenism, then, appearances actually perceived may be dependent upon awareness, even though, in some sense, they are also "part" of the object being perceived, and this object is not dependent upon actually being perceived.

Now the subjectivistic argument proceeds from the above premises to the following conclusion: (c) appearances are only mental or ideal. How does this follow from (b)? In order to arrive at (c), two senses of mental (ideal) have to be distinguished: (1) mental_1 , which says that appearances (ideas) are simply dependent upon or correlated with awareness; (2) mental_2 , which says that appearances (ideas) are identical with or literally part of awareness. Once these senses are distinguished, another step must be taken, and that is to assume that mental_1 implies mental_2 . If that is the case, then (c) follows from (b). However, as G. E. Moore has pointed out, to make the assumption

that mental₁ implies mental₂, involves an equivocation on the term "mental" or "idea." The realist might grant that ideas are mental₁ but not mental₂. The subjectivist must show that mental₁ implies mental₂; in other words, he must show that the appearances of which we are aware are identical with or literally part of our awareness of them. I do not see how he could do this, for as G. E. Moore says, to have an idea is to be outside the circle of our ideas; he says, "It is to know something which is as truly and really not a part of my experience, as anything which I can ever know."⁴

Having concluded, then, that the subjectivistic conclusion (c) above is illegitimate, a realist might try a new approach to answer the dualistic theory of perception. This twentieth century approach begins by rejecting both (b) and (c) above, and it is called Critical Realism. Sellars says, "The aim of the critical realists was to keep the intention of perception, its direct concern with physical things, while recognizing that sensory appearances could not be considered, as naive realism supposed, the very surface of external things."⁵ To the critical realists, an act of perception is "something more than mere apprehension or acquaintance";⁶ it contains judgment or belief. Perceiving is a complex operation which uses sensation as a guide but is concerned ultimately with physical objects. Ideas, then, or purely

⁴G. E. Moore, Philosophical Studies, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1922, p. 27.

⁵R. W. Sellars, "The Aim of Critical Realism," in Perception and the External World, ed. by R. J. Hirst (New York: MacMillan & Co., 1965), p. 235.

⁶Ibid.

subjective data are not the primary objects of perceptual experience, but, rather, physical objects are. The critical realists believe that perceiving involves more than sensing; there is "belief, construction and interpretation, all this leading to what is taken to be the awareness of things."⁷ In perception, then, "we regard ourselves as apparently aware of public things and that, in such sense-perception, we look, hear, and feel through sensory factors at objects."⁸ The belief in enduring, external things dominates our perceptual experience, and this is why we tend to mistake our sensations for these things. It is as though our sensations were the appearances of external objects, even the very surface of them. Objects control sensory data by giving them a setting and meaning. There is more to an object than its temporary appearance to us; it is the seat of all kinds of controls; "in short, all sorts of facts about the thing perceived are funded and influence our perceptual experience."⁹

Critical realists try to analyze and elicit the complete nature of a perceptual experience and show that there is in it the belief in external public objects which are somehow manifested in sensory appearances. Attitudes, expectations, memories, and accepted facts are all involved interpretatively to make us think we are aware of external, independent objects. We think we are aware of those objects through sensory appearances. So the perceptual experience becomes a complex, relational experience on the critical realists' view, and it cannot be reduced simply to things like colors or tactile

⁷Ibid., p. 236.

⁸Ibid., p. 237.

⁹Ibid.

sensations. It involves comparisons and contrasts. Objective reference is the localization and selection of things around us in terms of sensory factors, which we regard as the surfaces of things or as forces coming from things. In all perceptual experience, in other words, "a conceptual framework is operating."¹⁰

Sensory data are literally intuited by a perceiver, but in the act of perception, these literally intuited data are given a context which makes the perceiver regard them as an appearing thing. "It is to this identification or interpretation that belief, implicit or explicit, attaches. It is as though we were directly aware of a thing."¹¹ The process of perception, then, does not create appearances; it selects and brings into my field of awareness certain appearances which would have existed even if no perceiver were present to sense them. So according to critical realism, we can claim that we perceive physical objects directly, even though what we are actually intuiting directly are appearances.¹²

Now can we say that we can take some or all of the appearances a particular object presents to be appearances of that object? If, for example, the top of a box represents a rectangular appearance from one point of view and a diamond-shaped appearance from another position, the top cannot be identical with both of these appearances because

¹⁰Ibid., p. 239.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²This view is different from phenomenalism because according to phenomenalism, as we have seen, appearances are dependent on awareness in the sense that to be aware of them is for them to exist. This is not the case for critical realism. For critical realism, physical objects really exist apart from observers, and we can know them directly by means of the external references of sensory data and our conceptual framework.

they are not identical with each other. Also, are tactile appearances identical with one kind of part and visual with another? Are some of the appearances of the box identical with physical objects other than the box? If so, with what physical objects? Is the appearance of warmth in a fire? What about the feeling of pain? What about the appearance of stars that no longer exist? How can these be the same? What about appearances in illusions, dreams, and hallucinations? All of these questions point up some real problems with Critical Realism, and the Critical Realists have had trouble stating a cohesive view of perception from their perspective.

So the debate between direct and indirect theories of perception continues as hotly as ever. What is the relevance of this debate? What is the real issue at stake? According to some, including Thomas Reid, the issue is skepticism. If all we perceive are sense-data or ideas or impressions, how can we know anything about the external world? Reid says, for example,

. . . all these consequences of the doctrine of ideas were tolerable, compared with those which came afterwards to be discovered by Berkeley and Hume:--That there is no material world: No abstract ideas or notions: That the mind is only a train of related impressions and ideas, without any subject on which they may be impressed: That there is neither space nor time, body nor mind, but impressions and ideas only: And, to sum up all. That there is no probability, even in demonstration itself, nor any one proposition more probable than its contrary.

These are the noble fruits which have grown upon this theory of ideas, since it began to be cultivated by skilful hands. It is no wonder that sensible men should be disgusted at philosophy, when such wild and shocking paradoxes pass under its name. However, as these paradoxes have, with great acuteness and ingenuity, been deduced by just reasoning from the theory of ideas, they must at last bring this advantage, that positions so shocking to the common sense of mankind, and so contrary to the decisions of all our intellectual

powers, will open men's eyes, and break the force of the prejudice which hath held them entangled in that theory.¹³

If we are justified in believing any of the things we do about objects around us, then we cannot say that the ultimate premises of our knowledge refer only to appearances. Rather we should say,

. . . whenever we think we perceive a physical thing to have some sensible characteristic, then the fact that we think we perceive it is prima facie evidence for our belief that the thing does have that characteristic.¹⁴

So that, according to a direct theory of perception, what we are aware of when we think we perceive a physical object, at least usually, is just that physical object we think we are perceiving. We perceive the things which, as the result of stimulating our sense organs, appear to us in some way or other. There is really no reason to think that people begin with beliefs about appearances and then make inferences from such beliefs to hypotheses about external objects.

On the indirect theory, statements about the existence of material objects that we perceive are statements about certain causes which we take to exist, causes of the appearances we perceive. Now if that is what we mean by such statements, their truth will be harder to know (if not impossible to know) than the truth of such statements when they are taken, not to refer to the causes we take to exist of the appearances we perceive, but rather to things which we at least

¹³Thomas Reid, Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, in The Works of Thomas Reid, ed. by Sir William Hamilton, I (6th ed.; Edinburgh: MacLachlan & Stewart, 1863), 306b.

¹⁴R. Chisholm, ed., Realism and the Background of Phenomenology, (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960), p. 33.

take ourselves directly to perceive. These things we take to be, not a cause of appearances, but a cause of our perceiving them. This, then, eliminates the need for an inference from beliefs about appearances to hypotheses about external material objects. And it may be that the removal of this inference strengthens the direct theory and helps it avoid a certain amount of skepticism, although I am not sure that the difference between the two views (i.e. direct vs. indirect theories) is as great as some people like Reid have envisioned it.

In the following thesis, we will look at Reid's opposition to the indirect theory of perception (Chapter I) and his alternative to this theory (Chapters II-IV), and we will attempt to discern what kind of realism Reid propounded (Chapter V).

CHAPTER I

REID VS. THE IDEAL THEORY

Thomas Reid considered his major contribution to philosophy to be his attack on the theory of ideas. He says the following in a letter to Dr. James Gregory:

The merit of what you are pleased to call my philosophy, lies, I think, chiefly, in having called in question the common theory of ideas, or images of things in the mind, being the only objects of thought; a theory founded on natural prejudices, and so universally received as to be interwoven with the structure of the language.¹

Many philosophers have held the theory of ideas throughout the history of philosophy. Its new form began with Descartes, who said that what we immediately think about or perceive is not an actual physical object but a mental surrogate; for Locke, this surrogate was an idea or image in the mind that represents the real object. Reid himself originally held this doctrine. In fact, he says ". . . I once believed this doctrine of ideas so firmly as to embrace the whole of Berkeley's system in consequence of it;" ² Later, he rejected it because he could find no evidence for it, ". . . excepting the authority of philosophers."³

There are some problems one encounters when he attempts to delineate Reid's views on the ideal theory. One problem is, how did Reid understand the theory of ideas? He seems to present differing accounts of the theory. Another problem for the interpreter of Reid

¹Reid, I, p. 88b.

²Ibid., p. 283a.

³Ibid.

is, is Reid's theory of perception and sensation really that different from the ideal theory? I will address this question more a little later on in this chapter. For now I want to address the first question.

Sleigh points out four seemingly different accounts of the ideal theory in Reid:⁴

(1) . . . The hypothesis I mean is, that nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it: That we do not really perceive things that are external, but only certain images and pictures of them imprinted upon the mind, which are called impressions and ideas.⁵

(2) . . . But all philosophers, from Plato to Mr. Hume, agree in this, That we do not perceive external objects immediately, and that the immediate object of perception must be some image present to the mind.⁶

(3) . . . It is a fundamental principle of the ideal system, that every object of thought must be an impression or an idea--that is, a faint copy of some preceding impression.⁷

(4) . . . things which do not now exist in the mind itself, can only be perceived, remembered, or imagined, by means of ideas or images of them in the mind, which are the immediate objects of perception, remembrance, and imagination.⁸

Account (1) above says that any entity perceived is "imprinted upon the mind." Account (2) contrasts with (1) and invokes a distinction between mediate and immediate perception, and asserts of immediate perception what (1) asserts of perception generally. Also (2) does not say that images themselves are mental impressions, for, according

⁴R. C. Sleigh, Jr., "Reid and the Ideal Theory on Conception and Perception," in Thomas Reid: Critical Interpretations, ed. by S. F. Barker & Tom L. Beauchamp (Philadelphia: University City Science Center, 1976), pp. 77-85.

⁵Reid, I, p. 96a.

⁶Ibid., p. 263a.

⁷Ibid., p. 108b.

⁸Ibid., p. 210a.

to some ideal theorists, they need not be. Account (3) is a generalization of (1); namely, it asserts of all mental operations what (1) asserts only of perception. Account (4) is a generalization of (2). Reid saw no conflict at all between (1) and (2). When he was concerned with discussing accounts of our knowledge of the external world through perception, he formulated the ideal theory in terms of account (1) or (2). When he was concerned with discussing the theory about the general nature of intellectual operations, he formulated the ideal theory in form (3) or (4). Forms (1) and (2) above contrast, it seems, but they are not incompatible accounts of the ideal theory, according to Reid:

If it should be asked, Whether, according to the opinion of philosophers, we perceive the images or ideas only, and infer the existence and qualities of the external object from what we perceive in the image; or, whether we really perceive the external object as well as its image?--the answer to this question is not quite obvious.

On the one hand, philosophers, if we except Berkeley and Hume, believe the existence of external objects of sense, and call them objects of perception, though not immediate objects. But what they mean by a mediate object of perception I do not find clearly explained: whether, they suit their language to popular opinion, and mean that we perceive external objects in that figurative sense in which we say that we perceive an absent friend when we look on his picture; or whether they mean that, really, and without a figure, we perceive both the external object and its idea in the mind. If the last be their meaning, it would follow that, in every instance of perception, there is a double object perceived: . . . that I perceive, for instance, one sun in the heavens, and another in my own mind. But I do not find that they affirm this; and, as it contradicts the experience of all mankind, I will not impute it to them.

It seems, therefore, that their opinion is, that we do not really perceive the external object, but the internal only; and that, when they speak of perceiving external objects, they mean it only in a popular or in a figurative sense, as above explained.⁹

⁹Ibid., p. 263b.

Reid seems to be uncomfortable at times with the ideal theory's usage of the notion of immediacy. However, this notion plays an important role in his own thought. For example, he says that consciousness is the immediate knowledge we have of the present operations of our mind.¹⁰ Perception itself is the immediate knowledge of external objects which we have by our senses.¹¹ Perception involves a belief in the present existence of an object of perception that is irresistible and immediate.¹² When Reid talks about immediate perception, there are two aspects to it: (1) negatively, immediate perception involves a belief that is not the result of a train of reasoning and that requires no evidential support to be acceptable;¹³ (2) positively, immediate perceptions are the basis of all beliefs about the external world.¹⁴ With regard to these two aspects, Reid and the ideal theory are in agreement. Both agree that our a posteriori knowledge of the external world comes through the senses.¹⁵

The ideal theory, however, is committed to the thesis that the immediate perception of ideas provides evidential support for all reasonable beliefs about the external world. This Reid denies. He denies the existence of ideas. Reid says, "I believe ideas, taken in this sense [i.e. in the sense that ideas are the immediate objects of all our thoughts], to be a mere fiction of philosophers."¹⁶ He insists

¹⁰Ibid., p. 222b.

¹¹Ibid., p. 280a.

¹²Ibid., p. 259b.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 332a.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 331a.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 226b.

that the objects of immediate perception are material objects or the qualities of material objects. Therefore, it seems that Reid's basic disagreement with the ideal theory is ontological, i.e. he denies the existence of certain mental entities that the ideal theory adopts.¹⁷

According to Reid, the ideal theory proceeds from a dubious hypothesis against undeniable facts. The facts are: I exist; I am an embodied self with powers, abilities, dispositions; other persons like myself exist; we immediately perceive independently existing physical objects, etc. These facts are dictates of common sense. Whatever is contradictory to them is absurd. The hypothesis in question here is that the only immediate objects of perception are ideas or sensations. If this is true, then our beliefs about physical objects are not justifiable, and we are led, Reid believes, inevitably into Humean skepticism. Now since skepticism is absurd, Reid thinks that the foundational hypothesis of the ideal theory must be false. In fact, he thinks there is no real evidence for it at all.

There are some facts as we have already seen, which seem to support the ideal theory. These facts include the facts of perceptual relativity, optical illusions, and hallucinations. Arguments using these kinds of facts have frequently been used by ideal theorists to establish their theory. For example, Hume and Berkeley attempt to

¹⁷Sleigh believes that this interpretation may be in error. He argues that Reid's avoidance of skepticism is not due to any ontological commitments or lack of commitments, but rather to epistemological considerations. See R. C. Sleight, Jr., pp. 77-85. Also, see Selwyn Grave, "The 'Theory of Ideas'," in Thomas Reid: Critical Interpretations, ed. by S. F. Barker & Tom L. Beauchamp (Philadelphia: University City Science Center, 1976), pp. 55-61.

prove the ideal theory using facts of perceptual relativity and illusion. Hume says:

It seems also evident that when men follow this blind and powerful instinct of nature, they always suppose the very images presented by the senses to be the external objects, and never entertain any suspicion that the one are nothing but representations of the other. This very table which we see white, and which we feel hard, is believed to exist independent of our perception and to be something external to our mind which perceives it. Our presence bestows not being on it; our absence does not annihilate it. It preserves its existence uniform and entire, independent of the situation of intelligent beings who perceive or contemplate it.

But this universal and primary opinion of all men is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy which teaches us that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object. The table which we see seems to diminish as we remove further from it; but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration. It was, therefore, nothing but its image which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason; and no man who reflects ever doubted that the existences which we consider when we say this house and that tree are nothing but perceptions in the mind and fleeting copies or representations of other existences which remain uniform and independent.

So far, then, are we necessitated by reasoning to contradict or depart from the primary instincts of nature and to embrace a new system with regard to the evidence of our senses.¹⁸

In order to answer Hume's argument, Reid introduces Berkeley's distinction between real or tangible magnitude and apparent or visible magnitude. Real magnitude is the size a thing actually has; visible magnitude is the size it appears to have. For example, the real magnitude of a line is measured in inches or feet. Real magnitude

¹⁸David Hume, An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, edited by Charles W. Hendel, (Indianapolis: Babbs-Merrill Co., 1955), pp. 160-161. Hume goes on to question whether there are such things as "existences which remain uniform and independent," which are the causes of our perceptions, and he concludes that such existences do not exist.

is the object of touch but not of sight. We learn by experience to judge real figure and magnitude from visible figure and magnitude at different distances, so that the former becomes the sign of the latter (this is acquired perception for Reid; original perception, which is unlearned, is the immediate connection between a sensation and the quality of a body). Apparent or visible magnitude is measured by the angle an object subtends at the eye. The larger the real magnitude of the object is, the larger the angle it subtends at the eye is, and, therefore, the visible magnitude is larger.¹⁹

The real magnitude of an object has three dimensions, length, breadth, and depth, whereas apparent magnitude has only length and breadth. Also, the real magnitude of an object remains constant so long as the object is unchanged, whereas the visible magnitude of the object varies in inverse proportion to the distance from which it is viewed. Using this distinction, Reid can show that Hume's argument is invalid. Hume argues that as we move farther away from a table, its apparent magnitude diminishes; however, the real table does not change at all; its real magnitude remains the same. Therefore, we do not perceive the real table at all. (For Hume, of course, there may not even be a real table there.) Reid says this argument is fallacious because Hume's syllogism has two different middle terms, apparent magnitude in the first premise and real magnitude in the second, and these are not the same at all.

However, it could be objected, maybe Reid has not really answered Hume. Maybe what Reid calls apparent magnitude is the same

¹⁹Reid, I, p. 303b.

as what Hume calls "image," i.e. just as, for Hume, an image is a representation of an object, so, for Reid, the apparent magnitude is a representation of the real magnitude of an object. Therefore, even with Reid's distinction between real and apparent magnitude, it is not the real table I see but only its apparent magnitude. Reid responds to this as follows: when we see an object under normal circumstances, we must distinguish the appearance the object makes to the eye from the things suggested by that appearance (i.e. the object itself or its qualities). The former Reid calls the "visible appearance" of the object, and within it we must further distinguish appearance of color from appearance of extension, figure, and motion.²⁰ The appearance of color is a mere sensation, (i.e. an original and simple feeling of the mind with no act of perception involved), but other appearances like visible magnitude (extension) and visible figure are not. Nevertheless, they are presented to the mind along with the sensation of color, and they suggest to us the individual direction, shape, and size of the cause of that sensation.²¹ For example the visible position of an object is its position in the visual field. Objects lying on the same straight line drawn from the center of the eye have the same visible position, regardless of their distance from the eye. Objects lying on two different straight lines drawn from the eye have different visible positions; the size of this difference varies in proportion to the size of the angle made at the eye by these two straight lines.²²

²⁰Ibid., p. 142bff.

²¹Ibid., p. 145a.

²²Ibid., p. 143a-b.

The real figure of an object, then, is the position of its several parts with regard to one another. The visible figure, on the other hand, is the position of the parts of an object with regard to the eye (relative visible positions). Reid says:

. . . the visible figure of all bodies will be the same with that of their projection upon the surface of a hollow sphere, when the eye is placed in the centre. . . .

.
It is . . . the position of the several parts of a figured body with regard to the eye. The different positions of the several parts of the body with regard to the eye, when put together, make a real figure, which is truly extended in length and breadth, and which represents a figure that is extended in length, breadth, and thickness.²³

Using these concepts, Reid formulates several conclusions: (1) the visible figure of an object extends in two dimensions, length, and breadth; ideas and impressions, as mental entities, cannot be extended like this; (some sense data philosophers would agree with this because they could say sense data are not mental entities), (2) the visible figure of an object is a public object external to the eye, and it represents the real object (visible figures are real, not ideal, objects, although they are not material objects in three-dimensional space; there are other objects like them²⁴);

²³Ibid., pp. 143a, 144b. Some believe that Reid is presenting an early form of non-Euclidean geometry in his concept of visible figure. See, for example, Norman Daniels, Thomas Reid's Inquiry, (New York: Burt Franklin & Co., 1974).

²⁴Ibid., p. 144b. If this be granted, Reid seems to be no different from the ideal theory at this point; he just does not call those objects ideas or impressions because for him they are another kind of entity. However, some sense data philosophers would agree with this. Reid seems to limit his attack on the ideal theory to a certain form of the theory that deals only with mental impressions and ideas. But not all forms of the ideal theory limit themselves to mental impressions only. Against these forms of the theory Reid's refutation is useless. Reid himself seems to offer one such form of

(3) visible figure, like real figure, is the proper subject of mathematical reasoning;²⁵ (4) while it is true that visible figure is not really inherent in the object itself, nevertheless, there is a resemblance and a necessary connection between the visible figure and magnitude of an object and its real figure and magnitude, so that

. . . we can assign a reason why a circle placed obliquely to the eye, should appear in the form of an ellipse. The visible figure, magnitude, and position may, by mathematical reasoning, be deduced from the real; and it may be demonstrated, that every eye that sees distinctly and perfectly, must, in the same situation, see it under this form, and no other. Nay, we may venture to affirm, that a man born blind, if he were instructed in mathematics would be able to determine the visible figure of a body, when its real figure, distance, and position, are given.²⁶

Thus, not only are visible figure and magnitude not themselves sensations or mental impressions, (although they are some kind of entity for Reid) but also one can form a distinct conception of them without having any visual sensations at all. Hume's argument, then, does not support its conclusion. Since apparent magnitude varies as we know it must (while we perceive a real table), no more proof is needed that we are perceiving the real table; we are not perceiving just a representation of it. The laws of perspective account for the diversity in the visible appearance of objects.²⁷ If we reject the supposition that objects are external and assert with Hume that objects

the ideal theory in the case of visible figure, which is an entity of some kind, it seems, and which represents an object but is not an idea or impression. So at least in this case, Reid is inconsistent with his own account.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 147ff.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 142b-143a.

²⁷Ibid., p. 304b.

of perception are internal, then

. . . no account can be given of any one of these appearances, nor any physical cause assigned why a visible object should, in any one case, have one apparent figure and magnitude rather than another.²⁸

However, on Reid's view we can give such an account. For example, suppose I think I see a table, and as I move farther away from where I think it is, the appearance of the table continues to occupy exactly the same portion of my visual field. I would conclude that I was having a hallucination or experiencing an illusion and that I am not really seeing a table at all. If, however, as I move farther away from the place the table is supposed to be and the table begins to occupy less and less of my visual field, I could rightfully conclude that my perception of the table is truthful.

To summarize, Hume's argument (also Berkeley's) is a version of the standard form of argument from illusion:

1. Sometimes things appear other than they are.
2. When things appear other than they are, what we immediately perceive are ideas (sensations, sense-data, etc.)
3. Such occasions as described in (1) are phenomenologically indistinguishable from occasions on which things appear as they are.
4. Therefore, all we ever immediately perceive are ideas.²⁹

Reid refutes this argument in at least two main ways: (1) there is no need to introduce a class of mental entities called ideas to explain (1) above, which is actually not surprising at all; (2) such entities lead to confusion. Reid is chiefly interested in

²⁸Ibid., p. 305a.

²⁹David A. Tebaldi, "Thomas Reid's Refutation of the Argument from Illusion," in Thomas Reid: Critical Interpretations, ed. by S. F. Barker & Tom L. Beauchamp (Philadelphia: University City Science Center, 1976), p. 28.

refuting the second premise of the illusion argument. The reasoning behind this second premise is as follows: assume that a material object (O) appears (i.e. smells, tastes, feels, etc.) (Y) to a man (M), and (O) is not (Y); then something else, an idea (I) existing only in the mind really is (Y) and what (M) sees is (I), so (I) has all the properties (O) appears to have. First of all, Reid rejects the idea that there exists this something else in the mind; there is nothing else there. (However, it leaves open the possibility that he could accept a "something else" which is nonmental, and some sense data theories suggest this.) Another problem here is that ideas are of such a nature that they cannot be said to have properties which (O) appears to have. All the apparent properties of (O) are apparent physical properties. According to Reid, no account of these properties can be given in terms of sensations alone. Sensations are feelings, and they bear no resemblance to nor have any logical connection with our concepts of these properties.³⁰ More will be said about sensations in the next chapter.

Reid has other reasons for denying the ideal theory besides those involved in his criticism of the arguments from illusion and perceptual relativity. For example, for him the theory is useless as an explanatory hypothesis. Reid gives the reason for the ideal theory's development as follows:

There is no phaenomenon in nature more unaccountable than the intercourse that is carried on between the mind and the external world--there is no phaenomenon which philosophical spirits have shewn greater avidity to pry into, and to resolve.

³⁰Reid, I, p. 119.

It is agreed by all, that this intercourse is carried on by means of the senses; and this satisfies the vulgar curiosity, but not the philosophic. Philosophers must have some system, some hypothesis, that shews the manner in which our senses make us acquainted with external things. All the fertility of human invention seems to have produced only one hypothesis for this purpose, which, therefore, hath been universally received; and that is, that the mind, like a mirror, receives the images of things from without, by means of the senses; so that their use must be to convey these images into the mind.³¹

Philosophers, in attempting to account for the relationship between the physical object and the mind, have used the analogy of interaction between two physical objects. The problem for perception is how an object at some distance from the mind makes the mind perceive it. According to Locke, for example, bodies affect our senses by immediate contact or by means of impulses of sensible particles coming from them. Thus, particles transmitted by objects bridge the gap between an object and the sense organ. Ideas bridge the gap between the sense organ or (ultimately) brain, and the mind. The mind, then, is in direct contact with a present idea (this is the principle of cognitive contact).³² However, the theory of ideas does not explain how we perceive these mental objects. How does the mind perceive images "received" from the brain? The theory has no answer to this question. Hence, it has no answer to how we perceive anything.

Not only does Reid believe that there is no empirical evidence in experience to support the ideal theory, he also believes there is evidence that at least part of it is false. The proponents of the theory claim that a present idea is always the immediate object of a

³¹Ibid., p. 140a-b.

³²Ibid., pp. 368b-369a.

thought or perception, and that every object of thought must either be an idea or like an idea. Reid shows that we can think of something besides ideas or sensations. Therefore, at least this part of the ideal theory must be false (i.e. points (3) and (4) above). He says

. . . I have as clear a conception of extension, hardness, and motion, as I have of the point of a sword; and, with some pains and practice, I can form as clear a notion of the other sensations of touch as I have of pain. When I do so, and compare them together, it appears to me clear as daylight, that the former are not of kin to the latter, nor resemble them in any one feature.³³

The sensation of pain one feels when hitting his head on the sidewalk does not resemble the quality of hardness or the impenetrability of the sidewalk. Mental occurrences like sensations differ from qualities: sensations are intensive and non-measureable; qualities are extensive and measureable. Reid says

. . . they [the words heat and cold] signify a quality in bodies, which, by the laws of nature, occasions the sensations of heat and cold in us--a quality which, though connected by custom so closely with the sensation, that we cannot, without difficulty, separate them, yet hath not the least resemblance to it and may continue to exist when there is no sensation at all.³⁴

Another objection of Reid's against the ideal theory is that the theory is committed to the thesis that if a person thinks about y, then there exists a y, an idea, which is the object of his thought. This contradicts the common-sense belief that we can think about non-existent objects, e.g. unicorns.³⁵ We cannot think about nothing;

³³Ibid., pp. 127-128a. ³⁴Ibid., p. 119a-b.

³⁵Of course, an ideal theorist might hold that we can think about things other than ideas, including even non-existent things, but we can only do so via or by means of a mediating idea which represents these things. Reid would probably respond to this maneuver by asking what evidence there is for such an idea. He can find none. Also,

there must be an object of thought, but to think about a unicorn is not to say that a unicorn exists. Reid says

I acknowledge that a man cannot perceive an object that does not exist; nor can he remember an object that did not exist; but there appears to me no contradiction in his conceiving an object that neither does nor ever did exist.³⁶

A unicorn is not the same thing as an image of a unicorn. Though we can conceive of unicorns without forming an image, Reid would allow that we can conceive of a unicorn pictorially by forming an image of it. However, the image is not the object of thought, but is only a way or manner of thinking. Thinking is a mental act, but the thing conceived of is not a mental act.

The philosopher says, I cannot conceive a centaur without having an idea of it in my mind. I am at a loss to understand what he means. He surely does not mean that I cannot conceive it without conceiving it. This would make me no wiser. What then is this idea? Is it an animal, half horse and half man? No. Then I am certain it is not the thing I conceive. Perhaps he will say, that the idea is an image of the animal, and is the immediate object of my conception, and that the animal is the mediate or remote object.

To this I answer--First, I am certain there are not two objects of this conception, but one only; and that one is as immediate an object of my conception as any can be.

Secondly, This one object which I conceive is not the image of an animal--it is an animal. I know what it is to conceive an image of an animal, and what it is to conceive an animal; and I can distinguish the one of these from the other without any danger of mistake.³⁷

he would want to know what this idea is, and he would want to ask, why do we need such an idea at all? For Reid, all such ideas are mere fictions of the mind. To speak in terms of images or ideas is only metaphorical talk.

³⁶Ibid., p. 373a.

³⁷Ibid., p. 373a-b. If an ideal theorist were to respond to this by saying that I do conceive an animal here, but conceiving of something involves being in a mental state directed toward an image of which I am aware in some way (other than by means of conception), Reid would probably again say that there is no evidence at all in

Reid also contends that a correct analysis of misperception and misremembering does not require the ideal theory. We can explain such errors by saying that a person thought he saw something, but he did not actually see it. Reid calls this a "seeming perception." The sensation was not deceitful, but the perception was. In this connection, Reid uses the example of an amputated leg and pain in a nonexistent toe. The sensation of pain is real but the seeming perception of a disorder in the toe is not.³⁸

According to Descartes, our senses are always fallacious.³⁹ Reid replies to this as follows: if we put no trust in our senses, then we have no reason to suppose either that they err or that they provide good evidence for belief. The usual way we discover that any given perceptual belief is false is by discovering it is inconsistent with some other perceptual belief which we have reason to suppose is correct. Reid uses the example of a man who accepts a counterfeit coin as genuine and then complains that his senses deceived him. Actually, what happened was, the man made a wrong conclusion from the true testimony of his senses.⁴⁰ The way we check a perceptual belief is to take another or better look or to employ other senses to substantiate the testimony of the one. The supposition that perceptual beliefs are sometimes mistaken is supported by the fact that it

my mind of such an image or mental state. If there were such an image, I would certainly be conscious of it right now (Works, p. 222), but I am not. I am only conscious of the act of conceiving an object and this involves simple and immediate apprehension only with no judgment involved at all (Works, p. 223a).

³⁸Ibid., p. 320b.

³⁹Ibid., p. 334b.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 335a-b.

is possible to disconfirm a perceptual belief. Yet the process of disconfirmation presupposes that we can distinguish between perceptual beliefs which are and those which are not mistaken; therefore, it is self-defeating to suppose falsehood in everything they represent. The only proper or genuine errors or deceptions of sense Reid admits to are those which "proceed from some disorder or preternatural state, either of the external organ or of the nerves and brain. . . ." ⁴¹ The problem in misperception, then, is a problem of forming wrong conclusions from the testimony of the senses.

As far as Reid is concerned, the ideal theory, as an explanation for misperception and false beliefs, creates more problems than it solves. For example, the claim that we always think about a present idea eliminates memory in the ordinary sense, because there is no recalling an idea. I cannot bring before my mind numerically the same image or sensation I previously experienced. So the ideal theory would have me believe that I do not think again of something I have thought of before; this, however, is contrary to common-sense. ⁴²

I think the weight of the evidence, then, is on the side of saying that there is an ontological difference between Reid and at least one form of the ideal theory. There are also some other points

⁴¹Ibid., p. 338b.

⁴²Ibid., p. 355b; p. 106a-b. Again, an ideal theorist might say that I do not remember the idea itself; I simply call an idea before my mind, which represents a past event, and, thus, I remember the event. Reid would probably respond to this by saying that I cannot call the exact same idea before my mind a second time, and, besides, what is this idea anyhow? All I am conscious of is that I am thinking about a past event right now, and this event itself is the object of my thoughts, not any idea of the event. For Reid, only mental acts are attributes of mind.

to keep in mind. Reid does not just substitute sensations for the ideas of the ideal theory as mediators between the mind and external objects. Reid did not think that sensations are the same as ideas (assuming ideas are mental) at all. Ideas, for example, in Locke, resemble their objects. In Berkeley and Hume, ideas constitute objects. Neither of these is true of sensations. Reid learned from Berkeley that something experienced as mental, in the mind, cannot be attributed by relation of resemblance to a physical object in itself. Reid adds to this that such things cannot be attributed to the physical objects of our experience, i.e. to objects we experience as outside of us. In addition, Berkeley and Hume's skeptical conclusion that objects are nothing but ideas is also a distortion, because it does not fit with experience. Sensations for Reid cannot be added together to yield objects. Therefore, they are not the same as Berkeley and Hume's ideas.⁴³

Reid, then, certainly takes issue with the theory of ideas. As we have seen, his main tactic against the theory is to discredit the principles upon which it is founded. Another tactic he uses is a linguistic approach to the theory. In ordinary language, men use expressions like "have an idea of" as interchangeable with "think of" or "conceive." This practice, according to Reid, is theoretically insignificant. The former expressions are metaphorical. One says

⁴³As I have noted before, Reid seems to limit the indirect theory of perception to only those views which take ideas as mental entities. However, the theory need not be limited this way. If it is not, Reid's arguments lose some of their force, and he has not really refuted the theory as a whole at all.

"have an idea of" instead of "think of" because nothing more readily causes him to think or intend something than seeing an image (representation) of the object intended. No actual image is involved when thinking of something. If we do not grasp the metaphorical character of expressions like "have an image of," we can mistakenly conclude that intending is having images or that there are images involved in all intending. This is clearly not the case, says Reid. To be in the mind is merely to be an attribute of mind, and only mental acts are attributes of mind:

. . . what is commonly called the image of a thing in the mind, is no more than the act or operation of the mind in conceiving it.⁴⁴

Reid's own position seems to contain the following elements:

(1) we intend objects; some exist and some do not. We must concede we do not know how intending is accomplished, but this is preferable to positing mysterious entities on the basis of hypotheses derived from analogies to physical processes;⁴⁵ (2) an intending is not an image or idea; it is an activity; (3) the act of intending does not require an image or idea in order to be directed toward an object; (4) an object of thought or of an intending need not exist. Acts of intending are integral to so-called original acts of the mind, which include things like sensation, perception, and being conscious of mental acts.⁴⁶ Conceiving a simple object, O, may presuppose perceiving or being conscious of O, but it must be remembered that an act of perceiving has O as its object by virtue of including an intending

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 363a.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 369-374.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 114b-115a.

of 0. Acts of intending are not dependent upon more basic acts like sensation. For example, in perceiving some object as hard, a sensation may very well have to occur as a correlate, but, according to Reid, the hardness intended in the act of perception does not resemble its correlate sensation in any way.

Reid's own views on perception and sensation and their inter-relationship will occupy our next three chapters. I think we will find that Reid was better at attacking the views of others than he was at propounding a theory of perception of his own.

CHAPTER II

REID'S THEORY OF SENSATION

According to Reid, it is important to distinguish sensing from perceiving, and he attempts to do this:

The operations of the mind, from their very nature, lead the mind to give its attention to some other object. Our sensations, . . . as will be shewn afterwards, are natural signs, and turn our attention to the things signified by them; so much that most of them, and those the most frequent and familiar, have no name in any language. In perception, memory, judgment, imagination, and reasoning, there is an object distinct from the operation itself; and, while we are led by a strong impulse to attend to the object, the operation escapes our notice.¹

There are at least four distinctive characteristics of sensation:

(1) unlike perception and memory, sensation has no object; in sensation, act and object are one. For Reid, mental states are acts, either volitional or cognitive. All acts of the mind are intentional; i.e. each has an object. Sensations, however, are unique. In their case only, the object intended is not distinct from the act intending it:

Sensation is a name given by philosophers to an act of mind, which may be distinguished from all others by this, that it hath no object distinct from the act itself. Pain of every kind is an uneasy sensation. When I am pained, I cannot say that the pain I feel is one thing, and that my feeling it is another thing. They are one and the same thing, and cannot be disjoined, even in imagination. Pain, when it is not felt, has no existence. . . . what we have said of pain may be applied to every other sensation.²

In other words, when I perceive a tree, what I am perceiving is not a

¹ Reid, I, p. 240b.

² Ibid., p. 229a-b.

feature of the act of perceiving. But a sensation or feeling of pain is just a painful feeling. Such is true of all sensations. (2)

A sensation has just the characteristics it is sensed as having; it cannot have characteristics that it is not sensed as having.³ (3)

Sensation is a "natural principle of belief"; Reid says

But when I smell it [the smell of a rose], I am necessarily determined to believe that the sensation really exists. This is common to all sensations, that, as they cannot exist but in being perceived, so they cannot be perceived but they must exist. I could as easily doubt of my own existence, as of the existence of my sensations.⁴

As we shall see, there is also another sense in which sensations might be regarded as "natural principles of belief," namely, that they naturally "suggest" belief in material objects. As I understand Reid, however, he does not in fact, use this phrase, "natural principle of belief" to refer to objects of perception, but only to sensations. Nonetheless, our conviction of the existence of external objects is also the result of nature. Reid makes a distinction between sensation and perception. Sensations are feelings and feelings only, and when I have sensations, I must believe I am having them because they are nothing but my feeling them; perceptions have to do with external objects. He says

Sensation, taken by itself, implies neither the conception nor belief of any external object. It supposes a sentient being, and a certain manner in which that being is affected; but it supposes no more. Perception implies an immediate conviction and belief of something external--something different both from the mind that perceives, and from the act of perception

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³Ibid., p. 187a; 335a.

⁴Ibid., p. 105b.

The external senses have a double province--to make us feel, and to make us perceive. They furnish us with a variety of sensations, some pleasant, others painful, and others indifferent; at the same time, they give us a conception and an invincible belief of the existence of external objects. This conception of external objects is the work of nature. The belief of their existence, which our senses give, is the work of nature; so likewise is the sensation that accompanies it. This conception and belief which nature produces by means of the senses, we call perception. The feeling which goes along with the perception, we call sensation. The perception and its corresponding sensation are produced at the same time. In our experience we never find them disjoined.⁵

(4) We do not attend to our sensations except under special circumstances; most of the time, we overlook them completely:

The mind has acquired a confirmed and inveterate habit of inattention to them; for they no sooner appear, than quick as lightning the thing signified succeeds, and engrosses all our regard. They have no name in language; and, although we are conscious of them when they pass through the mind, yet their passage is so quick and so familiar, that it is absolutely unheeded; nor do they leave any footsteps of themselves, either in the memory or imagination.⁶

We can with difficulty acquire the skill of attending to sensations. Reid thinks artists can do this. Some sensations cannot but be attended to or noticed, e.g. highly pleasureable or highly disagreeable ones. Running one's head into a wall is a much different experience from simply leaning one's head against the wall. In either case, the sensation of hardness is experienced. However, in the first case, the sensation is of such a degree that it compels our attention and is regarded in its own right, rather than functioning simply as a sign of a quality of body. The second situation is somewhat puzzling. Reid says in this case, the sensation is overlooked,

⁵Ibid., pp. 312b, 318b.

⁶Ibid., p. 135b.

but it can be attended to with great pains and practice.⁷ The analogue of sensation is in language. When learning a language, we pay special attention to the sounds and the ink marks on paper which are characteristic of that language. The indication of proficiency in language, however, is our ability to overlook the sounds and the ink marks and to attend to what is conveyed by these signs. Similarly, if we are to philosophize about perception, we must go back to the signs.⁸

Every act of perception is accompanied by one or more sensations:

The one is the sign, the other the thing signified. They coalesce in our imagination. They are signified by one name, and are considered as one simple operation. The purposes of life do not require them to be distinguished.⁹

Because sensations are so easily overlooked when analyzing perception, and because they are either absorbed into the operation of perceiving or equated with its object, Reid considered it important to try to define or at least to characterize sensations. We have already seen that one characteristic they have is that they are the same as their objects. A second characteristic of sensations is that most of them can be located on not one, but two continua, the pleasure-pain continuum, and a second continuum involving either

⁷Ibid., p. 120b.

⁸Ibid. One problem here with Reid's use of the ink mark analogy is that ink marks are objects of perception, as sense-data or "ideas" are supposed to be, whereas for Reid, sensations are not. They are signs for perceptual objects, but are not themselves perceptual objects.

⁹Ibid., p. 132b; also see p. 310a.

different degrees of the same sensible qualities or different and complementary sensible qualities. For example, a sensation of touch can be either pleasant, painful, or neutral, and it can also be classified in terms of the hot-warm-neutral-cool-cold continuum. Similarly, a sound can be described in auditory terms, and also in pain-pleasure terms. However, the pain is not a second sensation accompanying the sound; the sound itself is a painful sensation.¹⁰

If every perception is accompanied by one or more sensations and if perception and sensation are so difficult to separate, why not simply equate sensations with acts of perceiving or identify sensations as the immediate objects of perception? Reid rejected both of these suggestions. Sensations are not acts of perceiving because they differ from them in structure. In perceiving, the object of cognition is completely distinct from the act by which it is cognized. Such is not the case with sensation, as we have seen.¹¹ Neither are sensations the objects of perception. They are completely different from the material objects which are the objects of perception.¹² We shall talk more about this point later on.

Reid does not really define sensations exactly, although, he does say that they are not objects but feelings; he says every normal person knows what solidity is or what pain is, and we all distinguish the two.¹³ Also, solidity does not imply a sentient being as its subject, whereas pain invariably does. Where and

¹⁰Ibid., p. 311a.

¹¹Ibid., p. 183a.

¹²Ibid., p. 290b.

¹³Ibid.

when pain occurs, there and then is a sentient being.¹⁴ This fact is true for all sensations.

Are sensations always accurate and do they provide us with any information on their own? Reid uses the phrase "testimony of the senses,"¹⁵ but he seems to equivocate on it. He might mean that with regard to sensation, the question of truth or falsity does not arise. We sense in various ways and that is all there is to it. Sensation is not judgment, and, thus, ". . . no sensation can give us the conception of material things, far less any argument to prove their existence."¹⁶ If this is the case, is it not misleading for Reid to talk about "evidence of the senses" or "testimony of the senses"? He wants it both ways. He wants no fallacy in sensation and he also wants the senses to provide us with information and with a ground of belief. In order to make the senses innocent of blame in cases of illusion, Reid says

Many things called deceptions of the senses are only conclusions rashly drawn from the testimony of the senses. In these cases the testimony of the senses is true, but we rashly draw a conclusion from it, which does not necessarily follow. We are disposed to impute our errors rather to false information than to inconclusive reasoning, and to blame our senses for the wrong conclusions we draw from their testimony.¹⁷

Further confusion in Reid's theory of sensation is caused by the fact that he uses the term "senses" in different ways. In some places, "senses" stands for the occurrence of simple sensations, with respect to which error is impossible: "It is impossible that there can be any fallacy in sensation; . . . If, therefore, there

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 229a, 289b.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 335a.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 313a-b.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 335a.

be any fallacy in our senses, it must be in the perception of external objects. . . ."¹⁸ Error comes from perception, not from simple sensations. In other places "senses" seems to stand for "perceives": ". . . by our senses we have not only a variety of sensations, but likewise a conception and an immediate natural conviction of external objects, . . ."¹⁹

One thing that seems clear in Reid's account of perception is that our senses do refer in some way to external objects, and this externality of the reference of sensations is an innate fact about human beings. One of Reid's basic premises is the following:

. . . it will be proper next to consider some phaenomena of the eyes, and of vision, which have commonly been referred to custom, to anatomical or to mechanical causes; but which, as I conceive, must be resolved into original powers and principles of the human mind; . . .²⁰

Reid thinks that some of our mental input is not conscious. At least, the conscious inputs we have in certain cases, e.g. in touch sensations, alone cannot explain how we form concepts of primary qualities. Non-conscious input plays a role in learning for Reid. Thus, he seeks to eliminate habit and custom, which depend on conscious inputs, wherever possible in his theory of sensation, especially in his theory of vision. He argues that "original

¹⁸Ibid., p. 335a. There is one kind of error which Reid attributes to the senses, and that is deception which can arise as a result of some disorder of either the external sense organ or the nerves and brain. For example, delirium or madness can cause deceptions of the senses. However, even in such cases, the sensations themselves (even though they are fallacious) are real feelings (Works, p. 338b).

¹⁹Ibid., p. 313b.

²⁰Ibid., p. 152a.

powers and principles of the human mind" must be invoked to explain things like our ability to maintain parallel motion of our eyes when attending to and tracking objects,²¹ our ability to see the real, not the inverted position of objects,²² and our ability to see single with two eyes.²³ After all, infants can maintain parallel motions of their eyes. Therefore, this ability cannot be acquired by habit.

The things just mentioned are things given by our constitution, or they are "original principles of our constitution" for Reid.²⁴ What does this mean? It means we must be constructed in certain specific ways or else we could not acquire certain abilities. Without certain built-in structural features of our constitution, we could not make use of relevant sensory inputs and develop particular abilities. However, Reid goes even farther than this. He says we are not just given certain structures by our constitution, but we are also given certain concepts or beliefs this way.

Our constitution is critical in understanding sensations and formulating concepts from them. Reid gives a thought experiment about touch sensations to illustrate this fact:²⁵ Imagine a blind man deprived of all the conceptions that play any role in the general theory of bodies and who is subjected to a variety of tactile sensations, e.g. pin pricks, varying pressure from blunt bodies, objects dragged across the skin, etc. Reid says the subject cannot derive

²¹Ibid., p. 152b.

²²Ibid., pp. 158-159.

²³Ibid., p. 181b.

²⁴Ibid., p. 188a.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 125b-126a.

any clear and distinct conception of primary qualities from these sensations. Common sense may lead him to form the unclear conception, "unknown cause of this known sensation of a pin prick," but there is nothing in the sensation of the pin prick to give him a clear conception of and belief in the existence of a hard, figured body. Reid says, "Having had formerly no notion of body or of extension, the prick of a pin can give him none."²⁶ Also, there is nothing in the sensation of a body dragged along his hand that can ". . . convey a notion of space or notion to one who had none before."²⁷ Sensation alone, according to Reid, is not sufficient to deduce primary qualities of body:

They [primary qualities of body] have no resemblance to any sensation, or to any operation of our minds; and, therefore, they cannot be ideas either of sensation or of reflection.²⁸

We have some notion of primary qualities as far back as we can remember.²⁹ Therefore, Reid can only account for such notions by attributing them to our constitution:

That our sensations of touch indicate something external, extended, figured, hard or soft, is not a deduction of reason, but a natural principle. The belief of it, and the very conception of it, are equally parts of our constitution.³⁰

All first principles and not just primary qualities are derived from our constitution also.³¹ We are so constituted that we inevitably and irrevocably develop these beliefs and notions. Our beliefs from our constitution are also unrevisable. In other words,

²⁶Ibid., p. 125b.

²⁷Ibid., p. 126a.

²⁸Ibid., p. 126b.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 130a-b; also see p. 122b.

³¹Ibid., p. 130a.

we are under necessity to assent to them. We cannot believe they are false either by sensory experience or by arguments. It is impossible for us to do without these native beliefs and concepts. Why is this? (1) We cannot do any reasoning without using these principles as starting points;³² (2) we cannot act on beliefs that are contrary to common sense. We test our beliefs through action or practice, and skeptical beliefs cannot be acted upon in practice.³³ Thus, ideas from our constitution are basic to our thought processes and to all sensation and perception. The guarantee for Reid that our constitution will not lead us to systematically false beliefs is his belief that God made us and would not deceive us.³⁴

As we have just discussed, Reid's belief in the externality of the reference of sensations stems from certain of his convictions about man's basic constitution. But what about the externality itself? This will largely be the subject of our next chapter, but I want to make a few comments about it here. Sensations are in us for Reid. He follows the model of pain, which is totally subjective and only exists in a mind. Now from these subjective sensations arises our experience of non-subjective objects, which are experienced as external objects. What is the relationship between these sensations and their external objects?

The link here is a signficatory one. A linguistic sign is the only apt metaphor to describe and explain the move from sensation to perception. Linguistic signs do not resemble what they signify

³²Ibid., p. 130a.

³³Ibid., p. 209b.

³⁴Ibid., p. 130b.

nor are they part of what they signify. Yet they carry us to what they mean and refer to. In the same way, we are carried by sensations to the experience of objects.³⁵

The relationship between sensations and objects is like the relationship between words and meanings. For one thing, both sorts of signs lack any intrinsic connection with or resemblance to what they signify. Of course, in ordinary language we sometimes do not separate a sensation from what it signifies, and sometimes we give the same name to a sensation and the quality it signifies.³⁶ However, even with blurred distinctions like these (which we also sometimes make in ordinary language between words and meanings), the fact is, that there is an ontological difference between a sensation, which is mental, and a quality in an external object. Philosophers must attend to this difference and study it.³⁷ A second similarity between sensations and objects and words and meanings is that ordinarily, there is no time-lag between hearing a word and being carried to what it means. The same can be said for sensations and their objects. Thirdly, just as one and the same word can have several meanings, so we can sense many different sensations when looking at one and the same object from different positions, distances, under differing lighting conditions, etc.

Sensations carry in them, then, external referentiality, which points toward objects and the qualities of objects of experience; and these objects and/or qualities are a different order of things

³⁵Ibid., p. 121b.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 120a-b.

³⁷Ibid., p. 120b.

from the sensations (signs) themselves. Sensations point beyond themselves to non-mental objects.

At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned four of Reid's characteristics of sensations. Certain seeming problems arise when one analyzes these characteristics and tries to put them together into a cohesive, coherent view of sensation. Duggan has pointed out some of these problems.³⁸ I want to discuss these briefly and to point out Bourdillon's suggested solution to them, because I think Reid can be shown to have a coherent view, and the contradictions Duggan mentions are only seeming and not actual contradictions.

The four characteristics mentioned earlier were the following: (1) sensations have no object; (2) sensations have only the characteristics they are sensed as having; (3) sensation is a "natural principle of belief"; (4) we do not normally attend to our sensations. These characteristics of sensations taken singly seem plausible, but taken together, some of them are inconsistent, Duggan believes. The biggest inconsistency is between (3) and (4) and it is this point that Duggan emphasizes.

Given the fourth point above, Reid is committed to the view that it is possible to have a sensation and yet not notice it. In other words, it is possible to be sensing and not believe that I am sensing in that way. Yet Reid also wants to say that whenever I have a sensation, I am necessarily determined to believe in the present

³⁸See Timothy J. Duggan, "Thomas Reid's Theory of Sensation," Philosophical Review, 69 (Jan. 1960), pp. 90-100.

experience of that sensation. Therefore, one cannot both have a sensation and not believe in its present existence. Reid, Duggan says, evidently does not realize he has contradicted himself here. To understand Duggan's claim, we need some background information about Reid's views on sensation.

Reid defines sensation, as we have already seen, as ". . . an act of mind, . . . that . . . hath no object distinct from the act itself."³⁹ He frequently points to analogies between pain and sensation in general. Pain for him was the model for all sensations. The credibility of his claim that sensation compels our belief in its present existence is partly dependent upon this pain model. By their very nature, we are compelled to believe in the present existence of all of our pains, and we are compelled to notice all of our pains. This seems to be true to our experience, so Duggan says we might be inclined to accept Reid's statement that sensation is a natural principle of belief. On the other hand, Duggan says, we might reject this claim because while pain is a good paradigm case for somatic sensations, the pain model can only be arbitrarily applied to ordinary perceptual situations. Why is seeing a tree or smelling a flower analogous to stepping on a nail? Reid thought these were analogous phenomena, but for what reason? He does not give any. He simply asserts that whenever we perceive something, we must believe in the present existence of the sensation that accompanies that perception.

³⁹Reid, I, p. 229a.

A sensation is also a natural principle of belief for Reid because there is no difference between the sensation and the feeling of it. As we saw earlier, we cannot be in error concerning our own sensations. This is the consequence of the claim that sensations have those and only those characteristics they are felt to have. It would be an intolerable conclusion for Reid that a person could believe himself to feel a pain even though there was no pain to be felt. Reid says one cannot believe that he is sensing in some way and not be sensing that way.⁴⁰ Therefore, sensation and belief seem to be associated as Reid has stated; i.e. sensation is a natural principle of belief. So that for him, it is impossible to believe that I am having a sensation of a certain sort and be mistaken, and it is also impossible to sense a certain way and not believe that I am thus sensing.

Why, then, do we fail, according to Reid, to notice or attend to the majority of our sensations? All perceiving presupposes sensing. (When talking about seeing as opposed to other modes of perceiving, Reid is reluctant to use the term "sensation." Rather, he uses the language of "appearances."⁴¹ Appearance is another name for what in talking about senses other than sight, Reid calls sensation.) Why, then, does Reid say we overlook sensations? Consider a man working in a factory every day; he does not attend to the noise, whereas an occasional visitor is immediately struck by sounds and the din. In this case, the worker is continuously having sensations, and these sensations become indifferent to him, so that

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 105b.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 133-135, 137.

they are not attended to. It is an empirical fact that many times people perceive things and can tell with certainty what they saw, but they cannot describe the appearance of the things at all; in other words, they cannot describe their sensation. They did not notice it. For example, I might say, "I heard a train but I did not notice how it sounded." This makes good sense. Perceiving does not presuppose noticing sensations. It does presuppose sensing.

Also, it is logically possible to overlook sensations. For example, something appeared to a man at a certain time, and the man now remembers that he did not notice how the thing appeared at that time; and, in addition, he now remembers how the thing did in fact appear at that time. This is certainly logically possible. So the basis for Reid's claim that we overlook many sensations is two-fold: (1) empirical facts, and (2) the logical possibility of the concept of unnoticed sensations.

Reid, then, seems to hold that as a natural principle of belief, a sensation cannot help but be felt and believed in when it exists, but at the same time, we do not attend to or even notice the majority of our sensations. Duggan now asks, why did Reid fail to see his contradiction? One possibility Duggan offers is that Reid was confused about the difference between one's having a sensation and at the same time not believing that he is having that sensation, and one's having a sensation and at the same time believing that he is not having that sensation. If Reid was confused here, the impossibility of the second situation may have been transferred to the first.

Duggan also offers a better explanation: Reid probably would have assented to the principle that "S notices a sensation which is f" entails "S believes that he has a sensation which is f," and maybe also to the principle that "S does not notice that he has a sensation which is f" entails "S does not believe that he has a sensation which is f." However, due to some of his discussions about consciousness, Reid may very well have rejected this second entailment. In other words, he might have denied that not noticing a sensation is a sufficient condition for not believing that one has that sensation. We are conscious, according to Reid, of all operations of the mind, and since sensation is an operation of the mind, we are conscious of all our sensations no matter how fleeting or indifferent they are. We can fail to notice a sensation, but we cannot be not conscious of sensations. Therefore, in order to maintain the thesis that sensation is a natural principle of belief and also the thesis that most sensations are unnoticed, Reid simply must have had an unspecified sense of belief in mind, ". . . a sense of 'belief' such that being conscious of a sensation, even though it is unnoticed, entails believing in the present existence of that sensation."⁴²

Thus, Duggan says, if believing and being conscious are understood in such a way that sensing logically entails being conscious of the way one is sensing, and if this entails believing that one is sensing in that way, then a different sense of "belief" is needed to make intelligible Reid's statements about noticing

⁴²Duggan, p. 100.

sensations. If Reid did hold this kind of a notion of "belief," the contradiction mentioned earlier is removed. However, to do this is not to use ordinary words in their ordinary, accepted senses, and this is contrary to Reid's own recommended way to do philosophy.⁴³

Bourdillon deals with the contradiction Duggan discusses and gives what I think is a plausible solution to the problem.⁴⁴ Bourdillon says Reid has not contradicted himself. In order to show this, one has to go outside the Inquiry Into the Human Mind, which is what Duggan mainly emphasizes. In the Inquiry by itself, Reid may appear to be inconsistent, but if all of his works are considered together, the inconsistency can be removed.

Consider the following passage in which Reid says:

I can think of the smell of a rose when I do not smell it; and it is possible that when I think of it, there is neither rose nor smell anywhere existing. But when I smell it, I am necessarily determined to believe that the sensation really exists. This is common to all sensations, . . .⁴⁵

As Bourdillon notes, two questions come to mind here: First, What does Reid mean by saying that one smells an olfactory sensation? If I enter a florist's shop, I might say, "I smell a rose," but it would be somewhat pedantic to say, "I smell the smell of a rose." Now if no rose were present in the shop, my first statement, "I smell a rose," would be judged false. But to say,

⁴³Reid, I, p. 139a.

⁴⁴Philip Bourdillon, "Thomas Reid's Account of Sensation as a Natural Principle of Belief," Philosophical Studies, 27 (1975), pp. 19-36.

⁴⁵Reid, I, p. 105b.

"I smell the smell of a rose," is less committal. I may doubt whether there are any roses in the shop, but, Reid would say, I do not have doubts about the sensation I am having. Even if someone were to try to convince me that what I say is false because there are no roses in the shop, I could still say, "I thought I smelled a rose," and I would not necessarily have to retract my claim to have smelled the smell of a rose.⁴⁶ This florist shop example pictures a situation where a person is conscious of a sensation; he feels it and attends to it.

But this brings up a different second question: What does Reid mean when he says no sensation can exist but in being perceived? In the Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, he does not talk about the perception of sensations, for "Perception is applied only to external objects, not to those that are in the mind itself."⁴⁷ Therefore, smelling a rose is an instance of perception; smelling the smell of a rose is not. The problem, then, becomes, what does Reid mean when he says that although I am conscious of all my sensations, nevertheless, I pay absolutely no attention to most of them? Is he equating "S perceives x" with "S is conscious of x?" Reid's language is somewhat confusing on this point.

In the passage quoted above, "S smells x" seems to imply "S perceives x." Yet if when smelling something, I attend to it and if the existence of the sensation depends on its being perceived, then it seems to make no sense to talk about sensations which are

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 222a.

not noticed. But this is the kind of conclusion Reid does not want. Reid wants to say that all sensations are felt, at least weakly, although they are not necessarily attended to. This point, Bourdillon suggests, is obscured by the fact that Reid is also trying to show that we could not possibly feel a sensation strongly, yet be in doubt of its existence, whereas when we feel a sensation weakly, we simply do not think about its existence. Thus, if we acknowledge an ambiguity in the term "perceive" analogous to that of the term "feel," Reid is making the following claims, according to Bourdillon: (a) all sensations are at least felt _w [weakly]; (b) any sensation felt _w can be, though usually is not, felt _s [strongly]; and (c) any sensation felt _s is the object of unmistakable belief.

These claims can help us understand what Reid means when he says that when one has a sensation, he is necessarily determined to believe that the sensation exists (i.e. sensation is a natural principle of belief, claim (3) above). Bourdillon says this claim should be understood as follows: (3') "When one has a sensation which he attends to [i.e. feels _s] he is necessarily determined to believe that the sensation exists."⁴⁸ Duggan points out, as we saw, that Reid uses pain as a model for all sensations, and he says that we must attend to all painful sensations and, therefore, believe in their present existence. If we thus attend to and believe in all painful sensations, we, therefore, believe in the present existence of all sensations. Duggan is skeptical about this analogy. Bourdillon responds to this by saying that Reid is not saying that everything

⁴⁸Bourdillon, p. 28.

that is true of pain is true of all sensations, despite the fact that pain is his model for all sensations. Pains, as a class of sensations, are unique because they are always felt _s (attended to), whereas most other sensations are not. Reid is simply saying that what is true of pain is true of all other sensations when I attend to them, and only then. When there is no attention, there is no necessity of belief.⁴⁹ An olfactory sensation which is smelled is one which is attended to; it is not just an object of consciousness the way any mental operation is an object of consciousness. Most mental operations are not presented to the mind at all; they are simply in it. Therefore, if (3) is taken as (3'), the incompatibility between points (3) and (4) disappears.

Recall, also, that Duggan attributes a special sense of the word "belief" to Reid in which sensing and being conscious of the sensation, even though it goes unnoticed, entails believing in the present existence of that sensation. Bourdillon thinks this is incorrect. According to him, Reid thinks there is a distinction between having a sensation (at least in the "sensing weakly" sense) and believing that one is having it because, as we have seen, when one senses _w, he does not necessarily attend to the sensation and, thus, he does not necessarily believe unmistakably in its existence. Also, Bourdillon claims that Reid believes that one can sense in a certain way and yet not believe that he is sensing in that way simply because he does not attend to the sensation, but rather to the object of perception. So, Bourdillon concludes, we do not have to

⁴⁹Reid, I, p. 105b.

accept Duggan's notion that Reid has a special notion of belief such that believing in the present existence of one's sensations as mere objects of consciousness is not something that one can fail to do. Reid does not require this notion of belief at all. Therefore, he does not commit the error Duggan accuses him of, i.e. misusing ordinary words.

CHAPTER III

REID'S NOTION OF SUGGESTION

Before discussing Reid's theory of perception itself, I want to discuss his notion of suggestion in more detail because this notion is crucial in understanding the externality of reference of our sensations, and this externality of reference is central to any theory of perception.

For Reid, the knowledge of the external world is built upon the foundation of natural signs. He begins with an account of the origin of human language:

By language I understand all those signs which mankind use in order to communicate to others their thoughts and intentions, their purposes and desires. And such signs may be conceived to be of two kinds: First, such as have no meaning but what is affixed to them by compact or agreement among those who use them--these are artificial signs; Secondly, such as, previous to all compact or agreement, have a meaning which every man understands by the principles of his nature. Language, so far as it consists of artificial signs, may be called artificial; so far as it consists of natural signs, I call it natural.

Having premised these definitions, I think it is demonstrable, that, if mankind had not a natural language, they could never have invented an artificial one by their reason and ingenuity. For all artificial language supposes some compact or agreement to affix a certain meaning to certain signs; therefore, there must be compacts or agreements before the use of artificial signs; but there can be no compact or agreement without signs, nor without language; and, therefore, there must be a natural language before any artificial language can be invented;¹

Primordial language consists of gestures, facial expressions, modulations of voice, etc. These are natural signs, and nature has

¹Reid, I, pp. 117b-118a.

given them a meaning; we do not have to. We do not learn their meaning. Nature has taught it to us; it is innate. The proof for this is that babies and men without any conventional language can communicate with each other. This natural language is unlearned,² and its vocabulary is the same everywhere.

There are three classes of natural signs, according to Reid:³

- (1) "those whose connection with the thing signified is established by nature, but discovered only by experience"; our knowledge of astronomy, mechanics, chemistry, etc. is based on this kind of sign;
- (2) those "wherein the connection between the sign and the thing signified, is not only established by nature, but discovered to us by a natural principle, without reasoning or experience"; this class of signs points us to knowledge about human thoughts, purposes, and desires;
- (3) "those which, though we never before had any notion or conception of the thing signified, do suggest it, or conjure it up, as it were, by a natural kind of magic, and at once give us a conception and create a belief of it"; this class of signs can be illustrated by the natural sign of the existence of a mind to which sensations belong. This third type of sign is the foundation of common-sense beliefs, like the common-sense belief in the external world. This belief is grounded upon the fact that our sensations are signs of the presence of physical objects existing independently of us.

In all the classes of signs, nature has established a connection between the sign and the thing signified. In no case is the

²Ibid., pp. 449b-450a.

³Ibid., pp. 121b-122a.

connection a necessary one. In the second and third classes, the signs are understood intuitively. This is not the case with the first class. How does the third class differ from the second? The difference seems to result from the origin of the conceptions involved in understanding the signs. To understand a natural sign is to have a conception of the thing signified and a belief in its existence. The conception involved in understanding a sign of the third class, however, is only obtainable by understanding the sign itself. Thus, there is only a single source of the conception of a physical object, as well as of the belief in physical objects, and that source is the significatory power of the sensations we have from physical objects. Conceptions involved in understanding second-class signs are obtainable without the mediation of natural signs. They are obtainable introspectively and only in this way. Thus, signs of the second class are unintelligible until we experience in ourselves what they signify in others. Conceptions involved in understanding these signs, then, would have to be brought to the understanding of them.

Natural signs are the language of sensation. Sensations are the natural signs of physical objects and their properties, and it is by understanding the signification of these signs that we can know what we do about physical objects and their properties. Without perception we could know nothing about them. To perceive a physical object is to have a conception and belief of it suggested to us by the sensations we have from it. For example, if I pick up a rock, I immediately perceive it to be hard, smooth, and oblong. If I attend to all I am aware of as I hold the rock, I notice feelings

in my fingers and the palm of my hand. These feelings have no name in any language. They are just called feelings of smoothness or hardness. We have to bring ourselves to attend to these feelings because their function is to point away from themselves to the object or source. These feelings for Reid are sensations. These sensations are not in the rock. Where are they? They are in the mind of the perceiver. Ordinary men would say the feelings are in my hand and in my fingers. Reid says that is a correct analysis from an ordinary man's perspective because an ordinary man does not reflect on the essence of sensation as a philosopher must do.⁴

When we compare the feelings of smoothness and hardness with smoothness and hardness, we find that they are very different, with no properties in common. For example, compare their modes of existence: we are comparing things that exist only when we are aware of them with things that exist whether we are aware of them or not. All I have to go on in perceiving that I am holding something smooth, hard, and oblong are sensations in my fingers and in the palm of my hand. This is the same condition I would be in if I were blind. I cannot have learned the signification of these sensations because there is no resemblance between the sensations and the physical qualities, and there seems to be no tie between them whereby the sensations might suggest the quality (i.e. the feeling of hardness is not a copy of hardness).⁵ But, what happens in reality is that

⁴Ibid., p. 320a.

⁵Ibid., p. 125a.

"all mankind are led by their constitution to conclude hardness from this feeling."⁶

We derive the notion of extension in a similar way. Sensations which act as natural signs give us the idea of extension.

Reid says

It is true we have feelings of touch, which every moment present extension to the mind; but how they come to do so, is the question; for those feelings do no more resemble extension, than they resemble justice or courage--nor can the existence of extended things be inferred from those feelings by any rules of reasoning; so that the feelings we have by touch, can neither explain how we get the notion, nor how we come by the belief of extended things.⁷

The only explanation Reid can give for how we can interpret sensations of touch and derive notions like hardness or extension is by means of the natural and original principle of our constitution.

Smell is another sensation Reid discusses. The word "smell," like the words "taste," "heat," "cold," etc., all have a kind of ambiguity, according to him. In common use such words stand for certain sensations and also for the qualities of physical objects by virtue of which we have these sensations. Most often they stand for qualities. However, the two senses of the words are usually molded in ordinary language into one meaning, and there is no need to distinguish them. Reid believes that philosophers must make the distinction in order to understand sensation and perception. In the case of the sensation of smell, smell is simply what it appears to be or what it is felt to be. But we know really nothing by the sensation of smell itself about smell as a physical quality. The sensation has no physical characteristics or spatial location. It can only exist

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 124a.

in a sentient being, and its duration is the duration of the consciousness of it. Such is the character of all sensation, as we have already seen.⁸ Reid says it is very difficult to attend to the elements of sensations themselves because we normally attend more to what the signs signify, and, thus, the sign and its signification tend to merge into one.

Sensations are essentially identical with our awareness of them, but they signify objects which are essentially distinct from our awareness of them, i.e. the objects are external to us. It is easy to confuse sensation and perception:

The same mode of expression is used to denote sensation and perception; and, therefore, we are apt to look upon them as things of the same nature. Thus, 'I feel a pain; I see a tree': the first denoteth a sensation, the last a perception. The grammatical analysis of both expressions is the same: . . . But, if we attend to the things signified by these expressions, we shall find that, in the first, the distinction between the act and the object is not real but grammatical; in the second, the distinction is not only grammatical but real.⁹

Reid thinks it is crucial to distinguish the two because they are different things. A sensation can be a mere sensation (i.e. be what it is felt to be) or a sensation functioning as a natural sign. For example, smell can be a mere sensation, and it can be a natural sign. Imagine a man, for example, who for the first time in his life suddenly is given the power of smell, and a rose is placed in front of him. He has a sensation of smell. What does he perceive by his sensation? He does not perceive the rose initially; initially he is simply aware of a new sensation in himself. This new sensation he feels signifies the existence of an external cause but nothing as

⁸Ibid., p. 105a. See Chapter II.

⁹Reid, I, pp. 182b-183a.

to the nature of the cause. If the rose is taken away, the sensation of smell disappears; when the rose is brought back, the sensation of smell reappears. The cause of the sensation, then, must be the rose or something in the rose. When our man learns this, the sensation becomes a sign of the presence of a rose, and the rose becomes an object of perception through smell.

The foregoing can help us understand Reid's foundation for his distinction between primary and secondary qualities:

. . . our senses give us a direct and a distinct notion of the primary qualities, and inform us what they are in themselves. But of the secondary qualities, our senses give us only a relative and obscure notion. They inform us only, that they are qualities that affect us in a certain manner--that is, produce in us a certain sensation;¹⁰

We attend to the sensations belonging to secondary qualities but not to those of primary qualities. Why is this?

The first [sensations of secondary qualities] are not only signs of the object perceived, but they bear a capital part in the notion we form of it. We conceive it only as that which occasions such a sensation, and therefore cannot reflect upon it without thinking of the sensation which it occasions: we have no other mark whereby to distinguish it. The thought of a secondary quality, therefore, always carries us back to the sensation which it produces. We give the same name to both, and are apt to confound them together.

But, having a clear and distinct conception of primary qualities, we have no need, when we think of them, to recall their sensations. 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.¹¹

We all know what extension, figure, solidity, smoothness, etc. are like because our senses tell us. This information concerning the nature and existence of these primary qualities is totally objective

¹⁰Ibid., p. 313b.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 315a-b.

information. When we perceive something as smooth, round, or soft, we know immediately that it is perceived as it would be even if we did not exist.

The situation concerning color is somewhat unique:

By colour, all men, who have not been tutored by modern philosophy, understand, not a sensation of the mind, which can have no existence when it is not perceived, but a qualification or modification of bodies, which continues to be the same whether it is seen or not. . . . The colour remains when the appearance ceases; it remains the same when the appearance changes.¹²

The appearance of color is a sensation;¹³ the color itself is not a sensation but a secondary quality of bodies.¹⁴ We do not call the sensation "color," but rather we call the secondary quality, "color."¹⁵ Visible objects have color, then, as a permanent quality, and color is not only an idea in someone's mind.¹⁶

Visible figure is the one exception to the rule that there is no necessary connection between a natural sign and what it signifies. Visible figure is the natural sign of real (tangible) figure; it resembles real figure and is necessarily connected with it. The visible figure of a thing is its perspectival figure. A thing has one real shape which does not change with different points of view and distance, but it has many different apparent shapes, depending on one's point of view and distance of viewing. Reid has trouble deciding what visible figure really is; in fact, he does not decide this question. He says

¹²Ibid., pp. 137a-b.

¹³Ibid., p. 137b.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 137b-138a.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 138a.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 138b.

If it should . . . be asked, To what category of beings does visible figure then belong? I can only, in answer, give some tokens, by which those who are better acquainted with the categories, may chance to find its place. It is, as we have said, the position of the several parts of a figured body with regard to the eye. The different positions of the several parts of the body with regard to the eye, when put together, make a real figure, which is truly extended in length and breadth, and which represents a figure that is extended in length, breadth, and thickness. In like manner, a projection of the sphere is a real figure, and hath length and breadth, but represents the sphere, which hath three dimensions. A projection of the sphere, or a perspective view of a palace, is a representative in the very same sense as visible figure is, and wherever they have their lodgings in the categories, this will be found to dwell next door to them.¹⁷

Visible figure is not usually noticed or attended to, although it can be with appropriate study and concentration.¹⁸ There is no sensation proper to it, by which it is suggested in vision.¹⁹ No sensation is present whenever we see except the sensation of color, but this is not the sign of visible figure. There is a necessary connection between visible figure and its dimensions and real figure and its dimensions. Visible figure is mathematically deducible, given the real figure of a thing, its magnitude, distance, and position.²⁰ A blind man can calculate visible figure from these data. So visible figure is the sign of the real figure of a thing being looked at, but we seldom attend to it.

The appearance of things constitutes a visual language which, when we learn it, takes us straight to things. Its signs signify as though we perceive these things without the intervention of any sign. The perception of real figure through visible figure as its

¹⁷Ibid., p. 144b.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 146b.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 145a.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 142-143.

sign is an acquired perception. The perception of visible figure is an original perception, and is something like the perception of real figure by touch. In acquired perceptions, generally, original perceptions become signs, and we learn them by experience.

As will be elucidated more later on, perception is an act of mind. It is a fact that perception does not occur without the appropriate sense organ and unless certain physiological events have occurred. However, we have no reason to think that these events are efficient causes of perception, that they transmit anything, or that they do anything to the mind, as a result of which perception occurs. Also, the anatomical and physiological conditions of perception are totally arbitrary. We could have been made to taste with our fingers, smell with our ears, etc.²¹ We could have been made to have all the perceptions we have with no sense organs at all or with no occurrences in our nerves or brain. Sensation follows upon the transmission of impressions from the sense organs to the brain, and perception follows sensation. How or why does this happen? Reid says no one can say. There is no reason to think that any link is a necessary link in the chain of events leading from impressions on the sense organ to an act of perception.²² One thing, however, is certain: if we had sensations only, we would be merely sentient and not percipient beings; we would be unable to form even a conception of external objects.²³

²¹Ibid., p. 187b.

²²Ibid.

²³In light of this, it is hard to see how Reid could claim that we could have all the perceptions we have "without any intervention

As we stated above, the theory of original perception for Reid is the theory of sensations as natural signs. The theory of acquired perception is the theory of original perceptions as natural signs and of sensations with acquired signification. Now how do signs present the mind with the things they signify? As we already said, signs suggest these things. Does not this make perception very devious, subjective, and uncertain? The notion of suggestion in Reid has aroused much discussion and some disagreement.

Reid introduces the notion of suggestion in the following passage:

I beg leave to make use of the word suggestion, because I know not one more proper, to express a power of the mind, which seems entirely to have escaped the notice of philosophers, and to which we owe many of our simple notions which are neither impressions nor ideas, as well as many original principles of belief. I shall endeavor to illustrate, by an example, what I understand by this word. We all know, that a certain kind of sound suggests immediately to the mind, a coach passing in the street; and not only produces the imagination, but the belief, that a coach is passing. Yet there is here no comparing of ideas, no perception of agreements or disagreements, to produce this belief: nor is there the least similitude between the sound we hear and the coach we imagine and believe to be passing.²⁴

At first reading, it seems that Reid is using the word "suggest" here in its ordinary usage. Winch, however, believes that he is not.²⁵

of sensations" (Reid, I, p. 187b); sensations seem to be essential to his theory of perception.

²⁴Reid, I, p. 111a.

²⁵See P. G. Winch, "The Notion of 'Suggestion' in Thomas Reid's Theory of Perception," Philosophical Quarterly, No. 3 (1953), pp. 327-341.

Winch says, suppose that I am sitting at a window where it is usual for coaches to pass by. Then when I hear the sound in question, would it not be more natural to say, "I hear a coach passing," rather than "I hear a sound"²⁶ which suggests to me that a coach is passing"? This distinction for Winch is important, and it points up an unusual way to use the word "suggest." For example, suppose I am sitting in a hut in a forest of pine trees. No coach road is within earshot. The wind springs up and some pine cones are blown down onto the frozen ground. The sound might suggest to me the idea of a coach passing on a road outside. This would be a natural way to describe my impression. Now to return to Reid's circumstances, suppose that as I sit at the window listening to the coach pass by, a friend asks, "What does that sound suggest to you?" I would not answer, "It suggests to me that a coach is passing by," but rather, something like, "Nothing at all," or "It suggests the sound of pine cones blown down from trees onto the frozen ground." The point of using this mode of expression here is not to describe what I actually hear, but to say ". . . what else, over and above the sound and what is making the sound, I am led to think of when I hear it."²⁷ The information is not about the sound and its origins, but about my own powers of imagination; the sound produces an imagination of what it suggests to me. The word "suggest," in fact, is used in these contexts to contrast with simply hearing a coach pass.

²⁶Remember that for Reid, sound is a sensation which is exhibited by the sense of hearing, and, as such, it functions as a sign for various perceptions, (Reid, I, p. 119a).

²⁷Winch, p. 329.

Other situations exist where "suggest" might appropriately be used in the sense Reid had in mind in his example. For example, I am listening to a radio quiz program in which recorded sounds are broadcast, and I am to write down what I think these sounds are. One sound might suggest to me the sound of a coach passing on the street, so I write this as my answer. This case is different from the previous examples because here it makes sense to ask whether I have given the right answer, whereas before, the correctness or incorrectness of my answer did not apply. Nevertheless, this seems to be an appropriate usage of the word "suggest." This, then, is a case which satisfies Reid's conditions that what I hear must produce a belief in, as well as an imagination of, that which is suggested. However, there is an important difference here, according to Winch. In his (Winch's) example, there is an element of doubt inherent in the situation, such ". . . that a confident assertion about the nature of the sound heard would be out of place, and it is this which seems to make the use of the word 'suggest' appropriate."²⁸ In Reid's example, however, there is little room for doubt; it is just a case of hearing a coach passing by. Thus, the notion of "suggest" in Reid's case is logically inappropriate and superfluous.

Why did Reid distort the usage of the word "suggest" like this? Why does its use in Reid's context not seem inappropriate? It is significant that Reid's example is from hearing, because we do not usually regard perceptions by this sense as so trustworthy as perceptions from other senses. We like to confirm what we hear by

²⁸Ibid., p. 330.

more direct methods of perception like touch and sight. This is because most objects are permanently available to be seen or touched, but they cannot always be heard. The sound a thing makes is usually transitory and is, therefore, accidental to the notion we form of the thing, whereas its appearance to vision and touch is regarded as essential. Thus, with the lack of certainty connected with our hearing, as over against the greater certainty of sight and touch, the use of the word "suggest" becomes appropriate for hearing because it, too, (i.e. the word "suggest") has the element of doubt connected with it. However, Reid's example, since it is a straightforward case of perception, makes it look like the notion of suggestion can be used generally to give an account of acquired perceptions for all the senses. But we must remember that just because statements made on the basis of what we hear are not generally considered as trustworthy as statements made on the basis of what we see or touch does not mean that many cases cannot be found in the realm of auditory perception in which there is no room for doubt in the statements made, and Reid's example is one of these. Thus, Reid is using considerations which are not strictly relevant to the features to which he draws attention in his example.

Winch gives an example from vision analogous to the other examples given so far, since Reid uses "suggest" in regard to vision also. He takes an example from Hamlet in which Hamlet sees a cloud which suggests to him first a camel, then a weasel, then a whale. What he actually saw was a cloud. If he had actually seen a camel, we would say he saw a camel, not what he saw suggested to him the idea of

a camel.²⁹ Suppose now Hamlet is walking in the desert and sees a shape on the horizon which he cannot identify on account of the distance. Is it a camel or cloud? The shape could suggest either to him, and he could confirm his impression by taking a closer look. The notion of suggestion is appropriate here because of the element of doubt (as in the former quiz program example). Also, this example from Hamlet is analogous to the other examples in which "suggest" is appropriate because the report here is subjective. However, neither of these conditions (i.e. doubt and subjectivity) is satisfied in the simple case of seeing a camel or seeing a cloud. Normally, there is no doubt about what is seen or touched, nor are the reports about what we observe subjective in the required sense. Nor in simple perception is there any passage of the mind from one thing to another thing, such as is characteristic of suggestion.

The first feature of acquired perception Reid wants to bring out with his usage of the word "suggest" is that there is no comparing of ideas to produce the belief; no act of reflection or conscious inference from one idea to another occurs. A second point of Reid's is that the suggestion of the idea of a coach when I hear the sound it makes is not natural or original,³⁰ but rather it is the result of custom and habit. Does the correct use of the word "suggest" (correct on Winch's criteria) involve this consideration? Winch says,

²⁹I do not believe that Reid would say this. Reid would say he saw a camel (assuming the camel was actually there to be seen), and the camel is suggested by the sensations present (e.g. shape, color, extension, etc.), not by "what he saw."

³⁰Of course, the sound itself is a mere sensation (i.e. it is what is felt to be) and, as such, it can be neither true nor false.

not necessarily. When the sound of a coach passing by suggests to me the image of a fireside scene at an inn, it might be held that this only occurred because in the past, coaches have been associated with such scenes in my experience. However, though it might be the case that the scene was suggested to me for this reason, it is not necessarily so. Past association is not a logically necessary condition of the correct present application of the word "suggest." Therefore, this point also provides no justification for Reid's use of the word "suggest" in his account of acquired perception.

What about Reid's use of suggestion in his discussion of original perception? Reid placed great emphasis on the logical differences between words referring to sensations and words referring to the qualities of external objects. A critical point for him was distinguishing sensations which have no existence but when they are felt, from things suggested by them. Because of this fundamental distinction between the concepts of the perceptual object and sensations, Reid cannot accept an account of the relationship between them which uses the notions of resemblance or logical connection.³¹ Also, no theory that asserts that the notions of external qualities are arrived at by means of some kind of habitual association between different sorts of sensations is satisfactory for Reid.³² On the other hand, our possession of the concepts of objects of perception does depend on the fact that we have sensations:

It appears as evident that this connection between our sensations and the conception and belief of external existences cannot be produced by habit, experience, education, or any

³¹Reid, I, p. 125a.

³²Ibid., p. 122b.

principle of human nature that hath been admitted by philosophers. At the same time, it is a fact that such sensations are invariably connected with the conception and belief of external existences. Hence, by all rules of just reasoning, we must conclude, that this connection is the effect of our constitution, and ought to be considered as an original principle of human nature, till we find some more general principle into which it may be resolved.³³

This "original principle of human nature" Reid calls "suggestion," and this he says is merely an extension of its normal use. Is this extension justified?

The characteristics of original perception which this usage is designed to bring out are the following: (1) in original perception, there is no comparison of ideas, no perception of any agreement or disagreement to produce belief; (2) in original perception there is no similarity between sensation and object; (3) the idea suggested in original perception is not the result of experience and habit; it is the result of a natural and original principle of our constitution. Point (1) seems to be true; we do not have a sensation, think about it, and then conclude that it is the sign of something else. (2) is more interesting. According to Winch's interpretation, there is no similarity between a sensation and the quality it suggests in original perception because each belongs to a different faculty of mind. Corresponding to the five different perception verbs (e.g. see, touch, etc.), there are five empirically distinguishable sense organs. It is plausible to say also that the objects of the five different senses are empirically distinguishable. There are features of the real world to which one can point in exploring the

³³Ibid.

difference between various senses, and this is what Reid has in mind when he says there is no similarity between the objects of one sense and those of another. He is referring to real entities in the observable world.

Now does the same hold true for the relationship between sensation and the object of original perception? Winch says here the analogy breaks down. For one thing, there are no empirically distinguished sense organs associated with sensation and perception, respectively. Secondly, in Reid's theory, when one feels a chair, he at the same time feels a sensation; he cannot feel the chair without having a sensation. One can show someone the difference between objects of the sense of vision and objects of the sense of touch by pointing to different sets of phenomena. But there are no such phenomena to point to to show someone the difference between the hardness of a chair which he feels and the sensation which he feels at the same time. All one can do is teach him the kinds of things that can be said of one but not the other. The lack of similarity between them is just this logical difference between the use of different types of linguistic expressions; it does not lie in an empirically distinguishable feature (s) which one detects after one has understood how the respective terms are used. The difference here is in logical type; it is a difference in the way linguistic expressions are used, not says Winch, a difference in empirical characteristics, so to talk as Reid does of two different mental faculties is misleading.

Winch thinks this difference can be seen clearly by contrasting a case of original perception with a case of genuine suggestion. When I hear a coach passing by and this suggests to me the image of a cozy

evening by a fire in a village inn, the image thus suggested is empirically distinguished from the sound which suggested it. Now although Reid seeks to persuade us that he has discovered an empirical fact like this, when he says an object of original perception is suggested by a sensation which in no way resembles it, it is clear that the differences are fundamental. What he calls feeling a sensation when we perceive a hard surface by touch is not something over and above feeling the hard surface in the way that having the image of a fireside scene is something over and above merely hearing the sound of a coach passing by. Feeling a sensation is an element already included in the common-sense expression, "feeling a hard surface." The lack of similarity between a sensation and the object perceived is not a mere contingent matter of fact which might have been different, but it follows logically from the way Reid uses the terms "sensation" and "the object of perception." It just does not make sense to speak of a sensation resembling an object of perception on Reid's account. But according to Winch, the relationship between sensations and objects of perception is not something Reid has discovered, as he claims, by accurate reflection and attention to the operations of his mind; rather, it is a logical consequence of the terminology he has adopted to describe these operations.

According to point (3) above, what is suggested by a sensation is not something which has necessarily ever been observed to go together with that sensation in the observer's previous experience. Reid goes farther than this too. The idea of the quality suggested is not only not suggested just because it has been previously associated with the sensation, but is also (at least when originally "suggested") a

completely new idea, one the observer had never had before, but which first enters his mind by a kind of magic on the occasion of his having the sensation. Winch says this is alien to the normal use of the word "suggest." In one sense, the observation of something might suggest to my mind an idea I never had before, e.g. the solution to a math problem. However, the ideas Reid has in mind are different; they are the ideas of empirical qualities, ideas only obtainable by confronting an actual instance, e.g. hardness. How can these be suggested to me by something that does not in the least resemble them as Reid claims? This claim of his forces us to conclude, says Winch, that we never confront actual instances of qualities like hardness, but these are always only suggested to us in the same way as the idea of a cozy evening by the fire in an inn is suggested by the sound of a coach passing by. Winch claims such an account is in obvious conflict with the facts of our experience. Therefore, we must not take Reid's use of "suggest" in this context too seriously.

Winch's view seems to be, then, that Reid is wrong in his theory of suggestion because it implies that all perception is doubtful perception, since the word "suggest" carries that connotation with it. Grave³⁴ says to establish his contention, Winch should have shown that Reid uses the word "suggest" in its ordinary meaning in an extraordinary context. Is the word, in fact, used by Reid with the implications of subjectivity and uncertainty, as Winch thinks? I think the answer to this question is clearly "no". According to Reid, we have by perceptual suggestion beliefs which are irresistible. This is his answer

³⁴S. A. Grave, The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960).

to skeptical conclusions about the external world. His theory of perception seems to be constructed as if there were no such thing as doubtful perception. The theory of natural signs leaves no place for degrees of belief. The range of application of the term "suggestion" is broad:

. . . sensation suggests the notion of present existence, and the belief that what we perceive or feel does now exist; that memory suggests the notion of past existence, and the belief that what we remember did exist in time past; and that our sensations and thoughts do also suggest the notion of a mind, and the belief of its existence, and of its relation to our thoughts. By a like natural principle it is, that a beginning of existence, or any change in nature, suggests to us the notion of a cause, and compels our belief of its existence.³⁵

We have these beliefs by a natural principle of suggestion, and they are beliefs of common sense; thus, they are irresistible.

Besides, according to Grave, the word "suggest" has a less common use in which it does not have any implication of doubt. Reid uses it this way, Grave thinks:

I may be quite sure of something; and then ask what suggested that to me? (I knew she was a school-teacher. What made me think so? What suggested to me that she was?) Granted that X suggests Y, there are two questions we might ask: What does X suggest? What suggested Y? The second seems to be more Reid's question. And in confirmation, the first question could not be asked unless X is noticed.³⁶

According to Duggan,³⁷ There are situations like Grave mentioned; for example, I might see a woman and think that she is a school-teacher. What suggests that to me? Maybe it is the way she wears her hair or the way she talks. In such a case, then, the claim that some person or thing has this or that characteristic is supported by mentioning

³⁵Ibid., p. 111b.

³⁶Grave, p. 180.

³⁷See Timothy J. Duggan, "The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense," Philosophical Quarterly, XII (January, 1962), pp. 81-89.

other characteristics the thing is perceived to have. It is not the way I am sensing at the moment that suggests to me that that woman I see is a school-teacher; rather, it is suggested by certain features of the woman herself. However, an adequate explanation of the notion of suggestion in Reid must confine itself to the fact that suggestion is a relation between perceptual beliefs and sensings. It must be one of our own inner states that does the suggesting, not any characteristics of the external object perceived. Duggan gives the following example: I see a person is nervous; what suggests this to me? He is pale, perspiring, clenching his hands, etc. If I am asked, what suggests that he is pale? This question is hard to answer. I might say, "I see his face is white." If I am then asked, "What suggests that his face is white?", I can only answer, "Nothing suggests his face is white; I just see that it is."

So Grave's proposal is only workable if we can mention physical characteristics of objects to answer the question of what suggests this or that perceptual belief. Reid's own statements and illustrations seem to forbid this proposal, however. His use of the term "suggestion" is best understood, according to Duggan, by taking the relation between sensing in a particular way and having a particular perceptual belief as a causal relation. Thus, to say a sensation (e.g. a sound) suggests a belief (e.g. that a coach is driving by) means that sensing in that way causes me to believe in such a way. If this is correct, then no familiar sense of "suggest" corresponds to Reid's usage of the term. Grave's solution seems to say that what does the suggesting is a reason for the belief, rather than the cause of the belief. Yet, according to Reid, sensations that suggest beliefs

usually go unnoticed. Reasons, however, are things one must be aware of. Therefore, in saying "sensations suggest beliefs," "suggest" should be interpreted so that what does the suggesting is not a reason, but a cause.

As should be clear by now, Reid's notion of suggestion is open to a number of interpretations. It is clear that this notion plays a very important part in his theory of sensation and perception, but he does not define the notion of suggestion very clearly at all. Duggan's suggestion that Reid had causality in mind makes sense to me, but Reid himself did not describe the relationship between a sensation and perceptual belief as a causal relationship. In the next chapter, we will try to bring together some of the things we have been saying so far so that we can attempt to state what Reid's theory of perception was. We will see, again, that he is confusing when it comes to stating his own view from a positive perspective.

CHAPTER IV

REID'S THEORY OF PERCEPTION

As we have seen, Reid's account of sensation and his notion of suggestion are both open to much debate and discussion. His idea of the relationship between sensation and perception is certainly not entirely clear. He does say that despite the difference between sensation and perception, the words which we use of sensations and their corresponding perceived qualities are often the same; e.g. the word "smell" may be applied to the quality of a rose or to the sensation derived from the rose.¹ He stresses that the objects of perception are not sensations, and there is no similarity between them. This is equally true of secondary qualities as of primary qualities. In the case of secondary qualities, however, their accompanying sensations are more likely to become objects of attention.

In the last chapter, we saw that Reid claims that the relationship between a sensation and its corresponding perceived quality in an object is one of suggestion. But exactly what "suggestion" means is certainly unclear. Some believe it means that a causal relationship exists between a perceived quality and a sensation. Hamlyn agrees with this point of view, but he says that even if Reid did hold to the idea of causality here, this would not necessarily involve him in a causal theory of perception, because for Reid it

¹Reid, I, p. 310b.

is sensations which are caused, not perceptions.² As we have seen, sensations bear no resemblance to perceived qualities, and they are distinct from perceptions. Sensations provide us with no basis for inferences about the nature of perceived objects. They are basically irrelevant epistemologically. Of course, sensations can be painful or pleasant, and, therefore, affect our interest and attention,³ but they are not the basis for our perception of physical objects. It is for this reason that sensations are not responsible for error; perceptions alone can be fallacious.⁴ On the other hand, the relationship between sensation and perception is not coincidental only. Reid's account implies that perception occurs because, owing to nature, we treat sensations as signs of perceptible qualities, although he denies explicitly that we make any inference from one to the other. Rather, sensations "suggest" the perceptible qualities of external objects by means of our natural constitution.

Reid gives two different but related accounts of sense perception: (1) a scientific or causal explanation, based on observation. He describes how we perceive objects and why we perceive them as we do. This explanation makes up the bulk of the Inquiry Into the Human Mind. What we call the perception of an external object is a complicated causal process involving: (a) the existence of the external object; (b) the material impression made by the object of perception upon the sense organ, transmitted by nerves to the brain; (c) the resulting impression made on the brain which excites a

²D. W. Hamlyn, Sensation and Perception (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 127.

³Reid, I, p. 318b.

⁴Ibid., p. 320b.

sensation or feeling in the mind; (d) some conception of the object perceived together with a belief in its present existence.⁵ Reid says

Our faculty of perceiving an object lies dormant, until it is roused and stimulated by a certain corresponding sensation. Nor is this sensation always at hand to perform its office; for it enters into the mind only in consequence of a certain corresponding impression made on the organ of sense by the object.⁶

(2) a philosophical analysis of the concept of perception; namely, what do we mean when we say things like "M perceives O" or "M perceives that O is Y"? The criteria for the adequacy of a philosophical theory of perception are difficult to define, but the theory must, of course, be both self-consistent and compatible with the established facts of perception appealed to and explained by the scientific theory. Also, a philosophical theory should help solve the metaphysical and epistemological problems associated with perception.

According to Reid, those espousing the theory of ideas failed to distinguish between sensing and perceiving.⁷ They may have been misled by the ordinary forms of expression, which are often the same for both sensation and perception.⁸ For Reid, sensations by themselves are merely feelings but they play an important (though not clearly defined) role in perception. There are at least three elements in the act of perception which are discoverable by reflection on the act: (1) we have sensations; (2) sensations suggest the conception of an object and lead to (3) an immediate conviction or belief in

⁵Ibid., pp. 186a-b.

⁶Ibid., p. 186b.

⁷Ibid., pp. 130b-131a.

⁸Ibid., pp. 182b-183a.

the present existence of the object.⁹ Immediate here means non-inferential. The essential difference for Reid between sensation and perception, as we have seen, is that sensation has no object or content distinct from the feeling of it, while perception, at least in veridical instances, has an existent object:

He that perceives, must perceive something; and that which he perceives is called the object of his perception. To perceive, without having any object of perception, is impossible.¹⁰

However, Reid also says that a person can have a "seeming perception," which is not the perception of a real existent object; for example, a man with jaundice can see a "body yellow, which is really white".¹¹

Perceiving, then, (including situations of seeming perception) is sensing in a certain way and at the same time having an immediate conviction of the existence of external objects. However, being in such a state of sensation does not entail the existence of the object we seem to perceive. Being in such a state does not guarantee the truth of the corresponding perceptual belief. Nevertheless, such a state is fitted by nature to produce belief in the human mind. Thus, any particular perceptual belief might, logically, be mistaken. However, we still have good evidence for such beliefs when the proper circumstances occur, and even if one belief now and then is mistaken, this does not mean that they all are.

Perception is what each species of perception like seeing, hearing, and smelling have in common. What do they have in common?

⁹Ibid., pp. 258-260

¹⁰Ibid., p. 224a.

All are ways we acquire original and usually true beliefs about the external world:

I know . . . that the perception of an object implies both a conception of its form, and a belief of its present existence.¹²

Perception implies an immediate conviction and belief of something external--something different both from the mind that perceives, and from the act of perception.¹³

Several things comprise the immediate objects of perception; prominent among these are bodies and their qualities:¹⁴

It seems, therefore, to be a judgment of nature, that the things immediately perceived are qualities, which must belong to a subject; and all the information that our senses give us about this subject, is, that it is that to which such qualities belong.¹⁵

The external senses have a double province--to make us feel, and to make us perceive. They furnish us with a variety of sensations, some pleasant, others painful, and others indifferently; at the same time, they give us a conception and an invisible belief of the existence of external objects. This conception of external objects is the work of nature. The belief of their existence, which our senses give, is the work of nature; so likewise is the sensation that accompanies it. This conception and belief which nature produces by means of the senses, we call perception.¹⁶

I see a chair on my right hand. What is the meaning of this? It is, that I have, by my constitution, a distinct conception and firm belief of the present existence of the chair in such a place and such a position; and I give the name of seeing to that part of my constitution by which I have this immediate conviction.¹⁷

The conception we have of the qualities of external objects cannot be derived from any sensation(s). The knowledge of the external world begins with perception; in other words, the conviction or

¹²Ibid., p. 183a.

¹³Ibid., p. 312b.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 319a.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 319a.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 318b.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 329b. Also see 326b, 332a.

belief we acquire about the external world is immediate.¹⁸ No process of reasoning is involved in perception proper. Since all belief presupposes some conception of what is believed, Tebaldi abstracts from statements like the ones quoted above the following general analysis of statements of the form "P perceives M":

For any perceiver (P), and any material object (M), (P) perceives (M) if, and only if, (P) acquires a noninferential belief in the present existence of (M) by means of one (or more) of the five senses.¹⁹

As we have seen, Reid holds that sensations are among the phenomenological accompaniments of our perceptions,²⁰ but his analysis of the concept of perception makes no reference to sensations at all. In other words, having sensations is not a logically necessary condition for perceiving. The connection between sensations and perceptions is purely contingent, and at least one perception (i.e. visible figure) involves no sensation at all.²¹

Sensing, then, according to Reid, has no object distinct from the feeling of it. Perception, on the other hand, always has an object, as we have seen. What about misperceptions? Does Reid posit an existent object in these cases? The answer to this question is not entirely clear. One view would answer by saying, "Yes, Reid does believe there is an object even in cases of misperception."

¹⁸Consciousness and perception are distinct faculties of mind for Reid. The objects of consciousness, sensations, and other activities of the mind cannot be objects of perception (in the same sense of this term, at least). Nor can we be conscious of external objects although we perceive them (see p. 222b). Consciousness and perception have different domains; they are logically independent sources of knowledge.

¹⁹Tebaldi, p. 29.

²⁰Reid, I, p. 318b.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 187b.

This view would explain a case of misperception as follows:

imagine a person who is sensing redly, i.e. he is caused (in some sense of caused) by some object of perception to have a sensation of red. He immediately believes in the present existence of his sensation, and he is led by nature to judge that there is a red object before him which is the source of his sensation. This judgment, however, is erroneous because there is no red object actually present in this case. This kind of interpretation of misperception might be supported by the fact that Reid sometimes talks of appearances as sensations, i.e. they are the way some existent object appears and affects our sense organs.²² Further support for this view might come from the fact that sometimes Reid substitutes "taking" for "perceiving,"²³ so that in situations where one mistakenly thinks he perceives some sort of real or material object like a chair or table, there is always some existent object he mistakenly takes to either be that supposedly real chair or table, or be related to it in some way.

The situation with the chair or table just described can be generalized to include all visible objects and the original and immediate perception of them. On this approach, when we originally perceive a visible object, all we actually perceive, according to Reid, are color, visible figure, and visible magnitude. Now at times, as we have seen, he seems to say that visible figure, color, etc. are real entities of some kind and, as such, are proper objects of perception. He also says that we cannot mistake our original

²²Ibid., p. 145a.

²³Ibid., p. 322a.

perceptions.²⁴ Therefore, in our original perception of visible objects, the visible figures and magnitudes and colors we perceive must exist in some sense just as we perceive them, even though they may not be the shapes and magnitudes and colors of the objects we take them to be of. For example, Reid says

A sphere may be painted upon a plane, so exactly, as to be taken for a real sphere when the eye is at a proper distance and in the proper point of view. We say in this case, that the eye is deceived, that the appearance is fallacious. But there is no fallacy in the original perception, but only in that which is acquired by custom.²⁵

On another interpretation of Reid's view of misperception, he does not posit a special sort of existent object in cases of mistaken perceptual experience, nor does he, in general, take such objects to be the immediate and original objects of perception. Rather, on this view, to speak of visible figure is just to appeal to the fact that in the original perceptual experience of an object, the real figure of the object appears in a certain way; for example, an object may appear round, although the real object itself is not round at all.

One problem in understanding Reid's view of misperception is his notion of visible figure even in cases of veridical perception. Sometimes he speaks of visible figure as the way an object appears (e.g. how a thing appears from different perspectives or positions). At other times, Reid speaks of the visible figure of objects as "a real and external object to the eye, as their tangible figure is to the touch. . . ."²⁶ This does not mean, of course, that a real

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 146b.

object has two different figures, a visible figure and a tangible figure; this, Reid says, is absurd.²⁷ It does mean, however, that visible figure is something extended and shaped; in fact, it can be the object of mathematical investigation.²⁸

So what can we make out of Reid's discussion of visible figure? Is there always an existent object (e.g. visible figure), distinct from the physical object, even if the object is unattended to? It would be tempting to say that, for Reid, visible figure is external and shaped, and it is an object of possible mathematical investigation, but it is not an entity of any kind; rather, it is a set of relations (and not an entity) between real figure and possible surfaces on which the real figure might be projected. The problem with this is that I do not believe this is Reid's view. For him, visible figure is not just a set of relations; it is some kind of entity, although, as we saw, Reid cannot define what kind. I am forced, therefore, to the conclusion that Reid is just confused on this matter of existent objects in every case of perception.

Two things are clear with regard to visible figure, according to Reid. First of all, it is not attended to; it is a sign of the tangible figure of objects, and we usually pass over it:

The difficulty of attending to the visible figure of bodies, and making it an object of thought, appears so similar to that which we find in attending to our sensations, that both have probably like causes. Nature intended the visible figure as a sign of the tangible figure and situation of bodies, and hath taught us, by a kind of instinct, to put it always to this use. Hence it happens, that the mind passes over it with a rapid motion, to attend to the things signified by it.²⁹

²⁷Ibid., p. 326a.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 142b-143a.

²⁹Ibid., p. 146b. Also see p. 135a.

Secondly, there is no sensation which suggests visible figure to us. Reid says:

. . . there seems to be no sensation that is appropriated to visible figure, or whose office it is to suggest it. It seems to be suggested immediately by the material impression upon the organ, of which we are not conscious: . . .³⁰

One important aspect of Reid's account of perception, which I have already referred to, is original perception. Original perception is totally uninformed by experience, learning, or reasoning. Generally, original perception means the immediate perception of "proper objects" of the various senses; for example, the visual perception of an object's real color as it appears to us (color is a proper object of sight) is an original perception. Seeing a sphere, on the other hand, is an acquired perception. Reid carefully distinguishes original perception and acquired perception.³¹ Acquired perception comes from experience and learning. For example, we can learn perception visually by touching and feeling an object along with seeing it. We can then associate visual cues or sensations with additional qualities in the object. Acquired perceptions are far more numerous than original ones.³²

The fact, as we have seen, that nature determines that when we have a sensation, we also have a perception does not mean, then, that experience plays no part in perception. Experience does play a part in acquired perceptions but not in original perceptions. Reid talks about the relationship between original and acquired perceptions in the same way as that between sensations and original

³⁰Ibid., p. 146b.

³¹Ibid., p. 331a.

³²Ibid., p. 185a.

perceptions. He uses the terminology of suggestion and signs, and he implies that original perceptions have no resemblance to acquired ones. Original perceptions are not natural signs of acquired perceptions because this link is due to experience. Neither is the suggestion involved here natural suggestion.

Hamlyn believes that by treating them this way, Reid undid much of the good that his distinction between sensations and perceptions had produced. Reid misunderstood the import of this distinction. He understood it as a distinction between two kinds of processes which take place simultaneously. Thus, he felt obliged to discuss the relationship between these processes, and, therefore, his theory becomes confused and quite uncommon-senselike. The distinction between sensation and perception is not one of this kind, according to Hamlyn. There may be certain occurrences which are appropriately subsumed under either sensation or perception, but it is a mistake to assume, therefore, that the words "sensation" and "perception" are merely names for these processes, and that all that is needed is to distinguish the processes. Reid makes this mistake, it seems. He takes the term "sensation" to be the name for something like a pain, and "perception" to be the name for something different and more complicated. Actually, for an understanding of the distinction between sensation and perception, we need "to understand the differences between the concepts under which, for one reason or another, different processes (or perhaps even the same process considered from different points of view) may be subsumed."³³ To

³³D. W. Hamlyn, p. 130.

understand a concept and to appreciate the reasons for subsuming something under it as an instance are the same thing. In this sense, Hamlyn says Reid did not fully understand his distinction.

Another confusion in Reid's theory, I think, is that at times he seems to have two different views on perception. Note the following passage:

I am conscious of this act of my mind [i.e. the act of the mind by which one perceives something³⁷, and I can reflect upon it, but it is too simple to admit of an analysis, and I cannot find proper words to describe it.³⁴

Does this passage imply a view different from the theory of natural signs? Here he seems to say that all that can be said about perception is that it is perception. This kind of view is more characteristic of the Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man than it is of the Inquiry Into the Human Mind. In the Essays, natural signs are more rarely spoken about. In places where he does speak about sensations as signs, Reid is inconsistent about what it is they signify. In the Essays in the chapter called "Of Sensation," he begins with the familiar doctrine of the Inquiry, namely, sensations signify external objects. The qualities of objects are perceived by means of sensations which indicate them.³⁵ Then Reid says that sensation signifies perception, and he seems to mean the act and not the object:

Every different perception is conjoined with a sensation that is proper to it. The one is the sign, the other the thing signified. They coalesce in our imagination. They are signified by one name, and are considered as one simple

³⁴Reid, I, p. 183a.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 310-311.

operation. The purposes of life do not require them to be distinguished.³⁶

Unfortunately, Reid nowhere else elucidates his meaning here. It is hard to see how sensations can be both the signs of perceptions and also the signs of external objects.

As has been suggested in the foregoing material, the sense of sight poses some special problems for Reid. He says one originally perceives both the color of an object and its position with regard to the eye; namely, he perceives its visible magnitude, figure, and motion. Although he does not ever perceive visible figure and magnitude without also perceiving color, there is no necessity in this. His eyes could have been created to perceive the former without perceiving the latter. In that case, he would be perceiving without any sensation. Reid says, "When I see an object, . . . I am not conscious of anything that can be called sensation . . ."³⁷ Since I cannot have a sensation without being aware that I am having it, it follows that there is no sensation appropriate to the perceptions of visible figure and magnitude. The conception and belief which constitute my perception of visible figure are suggested immediately by the material impression made upon the retina by rays of light.³⁸ Tebaldi says Reid is avoiding the real problem here. The question is not how one and the same material impression can give rise to or cause more than one perception, but rather how something of which we are in no way conscious can suggest anything to us at all.

³⁶Ibid., p. 312b.

³⁷Ibid., p. 145a.

³⁸Ibid., p. 146b.

Perception of visible figure is the exceptional case of perception without sensation. Reid's willingness to speak of suggestion even here, where visible figure is suggested immediately by something of which we are not conscious, indicates that he has a unique use for this word.³⁹ For him the term signifies an unknown mechanism by which we acquire any simple concept and belief whose acquisition cannot be accounted for in any other way.

It appears that Reid's reason for admitting the existence of perception without sensation is his inability to isolate empirically any sensation appropriate to the perception of visible figure. But he met the very same problem with the perception of the tangible qualities of bodies, and he concluded then that

When I grasp a ball in my hand, I perceive it at once hard, figured, and extended. The feeling is very simple, and hath not the least resemblance to any quality of body. Yet it suggests to us three primary qualities perfectly distinct from one another, as well as from the sensation which indicates them.⁴⁰

Tebaldi asks if a single sensation can suggest all these different qualities of a body, then why cannot the one and the same sensation Reid calls "appearance of color" suggest both color and visible figure? (After all, can one see pure color without any form or shape?) Then he could still hold that there is no perception without sensation. He could not say that every perception is united with a unique sensation, but he does not want to say that anyway. Why did Reid deny in the case of visibles what he asserted in the case of tangibles?

³⁹See Chapter III of this thesis.

⁴⁰Reid, I, p. 123b.

One possible answer to this question is that it might be concluded from the passage just quoted that Reid is concerned to keep primary-quality sensations and secondary-quality sensations distinct. Note that the suggestions mentioned in this passage are not the same as the suggestions of material impression we have mentioned before. Reid holds that we have clear and distinct conceptions of primary qualities of bodies, but no distinct conceptions of the sensations which suggest them; while we have only a relative notion of the secondary qualities of bodies as the unknown causes of sensations which indicate them and which are perfectly known. However, there is no necessity here. Primary-quality sensations (e.g. solidity, hardness, and softness) can also be perfectly known by pain and practice. So there is no a priori reason why one sensation cannot cause us to have a relative conception of the color of a body and a distinct conception of its visible figure.

A second possible answer to the above question is that maybe Reid wanted to draw attention to the absence of any necessary connection between the color of an object and its visible figure.⁴¹ He appeals to the principle that a sensation, but not a material impression, can suggest two or more qualities of a body only if there is a necessary connection between those qualities. He believes there is a necessary connection between hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, figure and motion, on the one hand, and extension on the other, because the definitions of each of the former qualities make some reference to extension. But there is no such

⁴¹Ibid., p. 146b.

connection between color and visible figure, for the latter can be defined without any reference to the former, which itself cannot really be defined. Also, color can be conceived, according to Reid, without any visible figure.⁴² This would give good grounds for treating the two cases differently, if it were the case that all the primary qualities Reid admits are suggested by the same sensation were logically connected; but they are not. Hardness is no more connected with smoothness or motion than color is with figure; yet, he holds that they are suggested by a single sensation.

If Reid's only reason for proposing that the visible figure of an object is suggested immediately by a material impression on the retina is that in vision the only sensation he is conscious of is the sensation of color, then Tebaldi thinks he should have argued as follows:

By sight I originally perceive both the color and the visible figure of bodies.

Every different perception is conjoined with a sensation that is proper to it [Works, p. 312].

But the only sensation I have when I see a body is the sensation of color.

Therefore, the sensation of color suggests (is proper to) both the color of a body and its visible figure.⁴³

If he had reasoned this way, Reid could have avoided an anomaly in

⁴²At p. 145b, Reid gives the example of a person with cataracts who might see color but no figure. Of course, just because a person does not see the figure of a particular object, this does not mean that he sees no figure at all.

⁴³Tebaldi, p. 31

his scientific theory of perception. There is really no legitimate reason to treat the perception of visible figure as a special case of perception without sensation.

As we have seen, for Reid the appearance of color is a sensation, but the appearance of figure is not. Why is the appearance of color a sensation? The appearance of color does not exist unless it is perceived, but the appearance of figure exists whether perceived or not.⁴⁴ Why is this? The only relevant difference between the appearance of color and visible figure is that a man deprived of vision since birth can, by mathematical reasoning, form a distinct conception of the visible figure of an object when its real figure, magnitude, and position are known, whereas he can never form a distinct conception of the appearance which that object's color makes to the eye. Thus, the appearance of color is a private, subjective entity, while the appearance of figure is not. Therefore, the appearance of color is like a sensation or feeling.

Now why did Reid accept an anomaly in his scientific theory? Two reasons might be suggested: (1) it supports his view that perception and sensation are two different things because one can perceive at least some external objects like visible figure, magnitude, etc. without any sensation at all; (2) if Reid were to admit that visible figure is perceived by means of a sensation, then he might not have been able to deny (as he does) that this sensation is all we really perceive, and his argument against the ideal theory would crumble, because his argument depends upon his being able to assert

⁴⁴ Reid, I, pp. 119a-b.

that what we immediately perceive by sight is a public object,
as Tebaldi says,

. . . his analysis of perception as the casual acquisition of certain sorts of beliefs, and of sensations as the causes and the phenomenological accompaniments of these beliefs, permits him to say that while it is true that we are immediately conscious of certain sensations whenever we perceive external objects, what we immediately perceive are not these sensations but the external objects themselves.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Tebaldi, p. 32.

CHAPTER V

REID'S REALISM

In this chapter I want to try to bring together some of the material in the preceding chapters in order to make an evaluation of Reid's realism. What kind of a realist is he? Is his theory of perception a direct or an indirect theory? Does he have a relational or a nonrelational account of intentionality in perception? Because of the nature of this chapter, I will be referring back to previous material and summarizing some of it, so that, hopefully, we can arrive at some kind of conclusion about Reid's view. We must not be surprised if our conclusions are not definitive, because, as we have already seen, Reid's theory of perception and sensation is quite confusing and unclear, maybe even contradictory at times.

As I stated in chapter one, realism is the theory that we perceive external or material objects. Direct realism is the theory that we are directly aware of external objects, and we know them without any awareness of mental entities which act as cognitive links, informing us of the external world. Indirect realism says that we are directly aware only of mental entities (sensa), from which the mind makes some kind of inference or mental transition to the existence of the external world. According to some indirect realists, we can know sensa indubitably, but we can make mistakes in making the mental jump to the existence of external objects. For example, in dreaming, sensa can be present, but no external objects really exist. Now where does Reid fit into this scheme of things?

One possible answer to this question is Immerwahr's view.¹ According to him, in the Inquiry we find indirect realism. There sensations are signs and objects are the things signified.² Only sensations are the objects of direct awareness, and so they act like the *sensa* in indirect realism. The external world is known only indirectly. Reid does, of course, reject representative realism, according to which our sensations inform us of the external world by being images or pictures of external objects. Reid says a sensation can only resemble another sensation, and no sensation can resemble an external object. However, Immerwahr thinks that Reid is still an indirect realist in the Inquiry.

In the Essays, though, the role of sensation is greatly altered. Frequently, Reid discusses perception without any reference to sensation at all.³ The sign-thing signified relationship is seldom mentioned. Why is this the case? Immerwahr suggests that in the Essays Reid is moving to a position of direct realism. In the Inquiry Reid speaks of perception as following sensation, while in the Essays, he speaks of sensation as accompanying perception:

Almost all our perceptions have corresponding sensations which constantly accompany them, and, on that account, are very apt to be confounded with them.⁴

This conception and belief which nature produces by means of the senses, we call perception. The feeling which goes along with the perception, we call sensation. The perception and its corresponding sensation are produced at the

¹See John Immerwahr, "The Development of Reid's Realism," The Monist, LXI, No. 2 (1978), pp. 245-256.

²Reid, I, p. 195a.

³Ibid., p. 258a.

⁴Ibid., p. 310a.

same time. In our experience we never find them dis-joined.⁵

The awareness of an external world is accompanied by sensation, not suggested by that sensation. Thus, there is now a changed role for sensation in perception.

To explain this, Reid introduces the notion of an "impression."⁶ An impression is actual physical contact between external objects and the sense organs or between the sense organs and the nerves and brain. Impressions are the physical, not the mental, element of perception, and we are not conscious of the impressions themselves. In the Inquiry, an external object causes an impression which, in turn, creates a sensation. The sensation then suggests conceptions and beliefs about the object. Thus, there is a sequence of events, and sensations are the link between the mind and the external object. In the Essays, Reid talks as if impressions cause awareness of external objects directly without the intervention of sensations. Sensation is something parallel to the process of perception, rather than simply a part of the sequence which produces perception. Immerwahr gives the following chart to summarize Reid's view:⁷

INDIRECT : --> External --> Physical --> Sensation --> Conception
REALISM : Object Impression (Suggestion) & Belief
(Inquiry)

DIRECT --> External --> Physical --> Sensation
REALISM: --> Object --> Impression --> Conception & Belief

⁵Ibid., p. 318b.

⁶Ibid., Essays II, Chapter II.

⁷Immerwahr, p. 250.

In the Essays, sensation is not a causally necessary part of perception. Reid here no longer uses the natural language theory of perception. There is still an innate element in perception (i.e. the fact that a particular conception follows a particular impression), but this is not understood on the model of a natural language of perception where what happens in perception is an innate association between the sensation and the conception and belief suggested by it. Sensation, however, still plays a role in the Essays. By being agreeable or disagreeable, they encourage us to seek out or to avoid certain kinds of perceptions.⁸ Sensations are also useful in acquired perceptions. By noticing the relationships between sensations and the external qualities correlated with them, we come to associate a sensation and a quality and, therefore, to make improvements on our natural perceptions.

Thus, Immerwahr thinks that in the Essays we find direct realism; here there is no analogue to *sensa*. Reid's goal is to combat the theory of ideas which, he believes, leads to skepticism. In the Inquiry, he does not really eliminate the barrier between the mind and the external world. He merely shows us a novel way to get through the barrier, i.e. see the sensations as an innate language which suggests knowledge of the external world. In the Essays, the barrier is gone; therefore, here is a more radical break with the ideal theory and a more modern theory of perception.

As Reid adopts direct realism, he drops the theory of innate or natural signs. This is not necessarily a clean break, however.

⁸Reid, I, p. 312a.

In the Inquiry there are passages suggesting direct realism, and in the Essays there are passages suggesting indirect realism. As we have seen, in the Inquiry, Reid argues that there is one type of perception which does not follow the indirect realism model, i.e. the perception of visible figure. There is no sensation appropriate to visible figure;⁹ sensations in visual perception only suggest colors, not shapes. Thus, visible figure is an anomaly in Reid's general theory of perception. But the fact that it is viewed as an oddity shows that Reid's overall view of perception is that of indirect realism. The visible figure problem is not mentioned in the Essays, probably because it is not a problem in the direct realism of the Essays, so it does not need to be mentioned there. On the other hand, there are passages in the Essays where perception is described in terms of indirect realism, and the sign-thing signified theory of suggestion appears.¹⁰ Immerwahr attributes these passages to the general character of the work, i.e. the Essays is a collection of Reid's essays over many years. Therefore, it is not hard to see how texts representing his earlier position got into the manuscripts of the Essays at certain points. The major evidence for the direct realist interpretation of the Essays is what is not said, i.e. Reid discusses perception for the most part without mentioning sensation at all. It is not this way in the Inquiry.

Another possible view of Reid's realism is the view of Cummins.¹¹ Cummins' view is, I think, the more accurate view of Reid.

⁹Ibid., p. 146b.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 312b, 315a-b, 331a.

¹¹See Phillip D. Cummins, "Reid's Realism," Journal of the History of Philosophy, XII, No. 3 (1974), pp. 317-340.

Reid's thesis that material things are the only objects of perception is open to two different interpretations. They differ in their handling of the intentionality of perception which underlies the ideal theory. One interpretation is that Reid retained the basic model for intentionality of perception which underlies the ideal theory. The other interpretation says that Reid developed his account of perception without following that model at all.

Some philosophers distinguish the physical from the mental. The distinctive feature of the mental is intentionality; mental activity is directed toward one or more objects. The distinctive of mental entities is that they are directed toward objects. For example, hope and remember: I do not merely hope or remember; I hope for or remember some thing; hoping and remembering are intentional. Now do statements with psychological terms as their main verb differ from ordinary relational statements with respect to their existential implications? Cummins defines an E-relation as, the "relation which can obtain among two or more relata only if all of its relata exist."¹² I want to use this notion in the subsequent discussion. Examples of E-relations would be spatial relations and physical activities. What about psychological activities? Some neither are nor involve E-relations. For example, one can think about, want, hope for, or fear what does not exist; one can believe to be the case what, in fact, is not the case. In these cases, mental states have objects but the objects do not exist. Thus, they must be different from ordinary E-relations, and they may not be relational at all.

¹²Ibid., p. 319.

Can any mental activities be explained in E-relation terms? The answer to this question is "yes." In at least one sense of the term, perception is such a case: there is a perceiver (subject) and the perceived (object). If there were no object, there could be no perception. Three arguments can be advanced to support this assertion: (1) to assert that one perceives something and then to immediately deny the existence of the thing he claims to perceive is absurd; (2) perception is a primary source of knowledge. How could perception be one's primary source of knowledge of material things if the perception of a body does not guarantee the existence of that body, and how could perception guarantee this if it were not an E-relation? (3) any counter examples can be dealt with by distinguishing between the proper objects of perception and objects whose existence is inferred on the basis of perception. For example, I might conclude I see a unicorn, but actually I see a horse standing behind the branch of a tree which has a sharp point.

That perception is an E-relation means that a given subject cannot perceive an object literally unless both he and it exist. Thus, there is a cognitive relationship between the perceiver and the perceived. An existent or actual state of affairs is needed as the object term of the relationship of perceiving. Call such objects "presented objects." Perception, then, is the awareness of a presented object, which is the given. Differences in perception between subjects is a difference between either the presented objects or those subjects' relations to those objects.

Historically, the debate over perception has largely been concerned with the nature and status of presented objects. There are

two main positions: (1) direct realism, i.e. some or all presented objects are material things or parts of the surfaces of material things and characteristic features of those things or those parts; (2) indirect realism, i.e. no presented objects are material things or parts of surfaces of material things; rather, they are sense-data or impressions or ideas. Objects of perception like hands, books, and tables have to be inferred. Indirect realists hold that in a statement like "I see a horse," the object "a horse," refers to a material thing which is not perceived but which stands in one or more specific relations to the presented objects. Since Reid rejected the doctrine of ideas (and, presumably, any other version of the indirect theory), he held that material things are the only objects of perception.

A distinctive characteristic of some mental acts like perception is that they are object-directed, i.e. intentional. Intentionality can be viewed from two different perspectives, a relational perspective, and a nonrelational perspective. According to the relational account, mental acts are interpreted as relations between a subject and an object. On the nonrelational account, mental acts are not relations. The chief problem with the relational account is two-fold. First of all, we can clearly conceive of things that do not exist at all. Secondly, we can, at least in some sense, perceive (or seem to perceive) such things in cases where it seems implausible to suppose that there must really be some physical thing which is what I am really perceiving (or misperceiving). To solve this problem, of course, the relational account can introduce and distinguish two sorts of objects of thought, i.e. an immediate object (e.g. an "idea")

which necessarily exists if the mental act does, and a mediate object which need not exist. On the nonrelational account, though, this move would not be necessary, since on this account, mental acts are not relations. Acts can but relations cannot occur with non-existent objects. Acts can be about states of affairs which do not and even cannot obtain. The theory of ideas for Reid was a variation of the relational view, and so he denied this. He consistently maintained that physical objects are the only objects of perception.

For Reid the intentional core of mental acts is conception:

It may be observed that conception enters as an ingredient in every operation of the mind. Our senses cannot give us the belief of any object, without giving some conception of it at the same time. . . . We cannot feel pain without conceiving it, though we can conceive it without feeling it.¹³

The element of conception is the basis for mental acts being about objects. The intentionality of mental acts for Reid reduces to his account of the intentionality of conception, and this account is not relational. He posits no existent objects to which the mind must be related when conceiving things. There can be conception of objects even when there are no existents besides the minds which conceive.¹⁴

Reid is a nonrelationalist, then, with regard to conception. With regard to perception, we must distinguish two sorts of objects:

(i) the real, directly presented physical object; and (ii) the object of conception. We also need to distinguish two senses of perception in relationship to these objects: (a) "seeming" perception in which (i) is absent, but (ii) must always be present; and

¹³Ibid., p. 360b.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 368a.

(b) real perception in which (i) (which involves a real relation) is a necessary condition.

Reid developed his theory of perception in the philosophical framework of dualism. He greatly praised Descartes, although he rejected Descartes' doctrine of ideas. For Reid (Like Descartes), there are mental activities and physical properties. There is a corresponding division among substances: whatever has mental acts is mind; whatever is extended and solid is body. One substance cannot be both. A man is a composite of two substances, a mind and a body.¹⁵ Knowledge of minds and their states is acquired by inner consciousness; knowledge of bodies is acquired by perception.¹⁶ Perception and consciousness are the two chief ways men have of knowing what presently exists. Neither is inferential in character. Rather, they yield first truths from which all conclusions are drawn about psychological states and the material realm. Are these mental acts of perception and consciousness infallible? We can only answer this question in the case of perception. Reid conceded that in some instances there are acts of "seeming" perception whose objects (material things having determinate qualities) do not exist; for example, a man can feel pain in his toes even after his leg is amputated.¹⁷ As we saw earlier, Reid rejected the charge that sense perception is unreliable, and he argued that most alleged cases of perceptual error are actually instances of errors in reasoning. There are cases of non-veridical perception. Perception is not

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 210b, 220-221, 269-270.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 222-223.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 338b.

infallible even though one who perceives is always prepared to assert the existence of what he perceives. Perception is the primary source of evidence concerning material things, but it is not infallible.

Thus, since Reid acknowledges that one can "seemingly" perceive things that do not exist, he does not construe perception in every case as an E-relation. For him the two main elements of an act of perceiving are conception and belief.¹⁸ What one believes is what he conceives of. Conception is that in virtue of which belief is intentional:

Belief must have an object. For he that believes must believe something; and that which he believes, is called the object of his belief. Of this object of his belief, he must have some conception, clear or obscure; for, although there may be the most clear and distinct conception of an object without any belief of its existence, there can be no belief without conception.¹⁹

At least three things stand out in this passage: (1) belief is a simple mental act; (2) every belief must have an object; (3) the occurrence of belief requires a conception of the object of belief. Belief for Reid is the affirmation of the reality or existence of the object of an act of conceiving or thinking. Therefore, if conceiving is not an E-relation, neither is believing, and, thus, neither is perception.

So we must show that conception is not an E-relation. To do this, we need to utilize the distinction Reid makes between conceptions which occur as ingredients in or accompaniments of other

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 258a, 326b.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 327b.

mental operations and those which occur alone.²⁰ Four points need to be noted: (1) every conception is directed toward an object;²¹ (2) conceptions are acts, not objects;²² (3) acts of conceiving do not intend objects by means of intervening or mediating images or ideas; (4) in many cases, what is conceived does not exist. Therefore, isolated acts of conceiving are not E-relations. Since there is no reason for thinking that conceptions associated with other mental processes differ greatly from isolated conceptions, we can conclude that no conceptions are E-relations.

Reid placed three restrictions on perceptual experiences: (a) only acts which intend bodies and their qualities can be perceptions; if a cognitive act has a mental operation as its object, it is an act of consciousness, not perception; (b) perception is the experience of something simultaneous with itself; perception only yields knowledge of the present. Thus, an act of mind which does not involve a belief in the present existence of a material thing is not an act of perception; (c) there must be belief in the existence of the object which is perceived.²³ But from the fact that in perception, the subject is convinced of the existence of

²⁰Ibid., p. 223a.

²¹Ibid., p. 368a.

²²Ibid., p. 363a.

²³This must be a mistake for Reid, but it is not a fundamental one. A person certainly can perceive but not believe in the perceptual object, e.g. in the case of a distortion of some kind or in cases of perceiving unicorns or centaurs. However, remember that the intentional core of belief is an act of conceiving; conceiving is the essential part of perception; belief is not essential. Reid should have said here that belief is normally part of a perceptual act, but it does not have to be present.

the object of his perception, it does not follow that the object actually exists.

Now according to Reid, sensations are a unique class of mental acts. They are known initially by acts of consciousness, but unlike other mental acts, they are nonintentional.²⁴ They are acts of mind because only a sentient being can have sensations.²⁵ Every act of perception is accompanied by or preceded by one or more sensations, so that sensations and perceptions are concomitant acts.²⁶ Perceptions themselves are nonsensuous but sensations compensate for that deficiency. So there is a close connection between sensation and perception. As we have seen, in quite a few places, especially in the Inquiry Reid compares sensations to linguistic signs which signify or indicate perceptual objects. A linguistic sign is usually distinct from and dissimilar to its referent. When the spoken sign is heard, no attention is paid to it; one thinks only and immediately of the referent. According to Reid, in most perceptual situations, sensations go unnoticed, and since they have nothing in common with perceptual objects, he calls them signs. This suggests that a sensation signifies a material object because a connection between them has been experienced. Also, it suggests that sensations are either acts or objects of perception. However, these suggestions Reid denies emphatically.²⁸

²⁴Reid, I, p. 229a.

²⁵Ibid., p. 312b.

²⁶Ibid., p. 229b.

²⁷Ibid., p. 311a.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 332a, 183a.

Perception is intentional, whereas in sensation one cannot distinguish the act and the object. Sensations are not objects of perception; they are objects of inner consciousness.²⁹ What distinguishes the types of cognitive acts are the categorical differences in their objects. The difference between acts of inner consciousness and acts of perception is that the former are acts of the mind involving a conception of mental operations, while the latter involve a conception of material qualities. Thus, since a sensation is a mental activity whose existence presupposes a mind, it is an object of consciousness, not a perception. Bodies and qualities have nothing in common with sensations. Sensations are not objects of perception; they are radically different.³⁰ Reid denies that what is perceived in bodies, i.e. their qualities, is identical with sensations. Only such qualities are perceived; sensations merely accompany acts of perceiving.

So for Reid, because perception is not an E-relation (except insofar as its object is the real physical object of perception), the object of perception is not considered an entity of some special non-physical sort (e.g. an "idea" or sense datum), which stands in the relation of being apprehended by a subject or a mind. He is not committed either to the view that whenever one perceives, the object of perception really exists materially (although when one does perceive, he is always convinced of the existence of some material thing), or the view that whenever one perceives, some other sort of perceptual object must exist. Therefore, when one perceives a coin double,

²⁹Ibid., p. 311b.

³⁰Ibid., p. 290b.

he is not perceiving two things; this is absurd. Conceptions, not actual objects determine the objects intended in perception, and the objects of conception need not exist. Thus, a nonrelational view of intentionality seems to be essential to Reid's mature view of perception.

Understood this way, problems such as Prior mentions seem to disappear. Prior points out the clear distinction Reid makes between sensation and perception. Perception has an object, while sensation does not, and it is because we can distinguish between a mental act and its object that we can say that although the former must exist, the latter need not. Prior criticizes Reid at this point and says it is hard to hold together the following propositions:

- (1) That when X thinks of Y, aims at Y, worships Y, etc., there is always a Y involved as well as an X.
- (2) That in some cases, when X thinks of Y, etc., there is no Y there at all.³¹

Prior claims it is hard to hold these and at the same time to reject the following kinds of moves that might make them consistent: (a) thinking of an unreal object is a different kind of activity from thinking of a real object; (b) when I think of anything, I enter into a relation, not with that thing, but only with an idea or some such thing which may or may not represent a real thing; (c) there are strong and weak kinds of reality; all objects of thought possess at least the weak sort, but only a small subclass of objects possess the strong sort.

³¹A. N. Prior, Objects of Thought, ed. by P. T. Geach and A. J. P. Kenney (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 127.

Reid, of course, denies all such moves as these, so Prior thinks we cannot take him too seriously when he insists that thinking of something means that there is always an object being thought of. However, on a nonrelational account, Reid's view seems to make sense as it stands. Prior seems to be assuming an E-relation kind of realism from the start, and then he tries to fit Reid into it. I do not think this can legitimately be done.

Similarly, the need for Grave's attempt to harmonize Reid vanishes on a nonrelational account. Grave asks, is Reid's theory a theory of direct perception? For example, in the case of touch, I feel the shape, solidity, and smoothness of an object I am holding by means of sensations of touch. Will the theory of natural signs fit Reid's account of perception by touch? Grave says "no"; the theory is inappropriate to his account. To speak of the transition of the mind from the sign to what it signifies, and to speak of the conception and belief suggested by the sign, are misdescriptions of the simplicity of the experience. Natural signs operate here as if they did not exist. So there are some passages, according to Grave, in which Reid seems to teach direct perception (e.g. in passages dealing with the perception of visible figure) and others in which he teaches indirect perception (e.g. passages dealing with sensations as natural signs which suggest objects). Grave says both are part of Reid's theory, and they need to be harmonized.

But, as Greenberg says,³² to ask whether Reid is a direct or indirect realist is to ask the wrong question and to hinder the proper

³²See Arthur R. Greenberg, "Reid, Berkeley, and Notional Knowledge," The Monist, LXI, No. 2 (1978), pp. 271-282.

interpretation of his philosophy. When interpreting Reid's account of perception, one faces a dilemma. If one examines theories of perception on the assumption that perception is necessarily a relational act of mind, then he will translate the question, did philosopher Y hold to direct or indirect realism?, into the question, did philosopher Y characterize the objects of perception as material objects or as sense data (ideas)? Since the first alternative seems to preclude nonveridical perception of material things, one familiar with Reid's writings would conclude he was not a direct realist. Since the second alternative is not open to one who attacks ideas and impressions as fictions, as Reid did, one would conclude that Reid is a direct realist. This would lead to an inconsistent Reid. To avoid this problem, one can change his approach to the interpretation of Reid. Namely, he can define an indirect realist as one who holds that knowledge of material things is inherently inferential and a direct realist as one who holds that perception involves non-inferential knowledge of material things. Grave does this. The question for him, then, becomes, not what are the objects of perception, but is perception truly noninferential for Reid? Reid says perception is noninferential, but he also says sensations are natural signs which suggest material things. This seems to suggest indirect realism, i.e. that perception is inferential. Grave handles this problem by saying, as we saw earlier, that there is an ordinary meaning of the word "suggest" which does not carry any implication of doubt. Thus, any inference from sensation to perception is automatic and certain and immediate. But we saw also that Duggan argues that any ordinary sense of "suggest" would be one

where the items that provide the suggestion are themselves either past or present objects of sense experience. Therefore, any such attempt at clarifying Reid's meaning must fail. Grave's problem is that he assumes a relational account of mental acts to begin with, and then he tries to place Reid within that account. Reid does not fit into that kind of theory.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Thomas Reid saw himself as a refuter of the ideal theory of perception. He could make no sense out of such a theory nor out of the theory's claim that there are such things as "ideas" in the mind which are the direct objects of perception. Reid believed such a view would ultimately lead to total skepticism about the external world. Of course, as we have seen, one of Reid's problems with the indirect theory of perception is that he limits his discussion and refutation of it to the subjectivistic version only. Thus, he does not necessarily succeed in refuting all versions of the indirect theory.

In the face of Reid's obvious aversion to the ideal theory, I think we have to conclude that he is offering as an alternative some kind of a direct theory of perception. But as we have seen, Reid is not always consistent in his theory of perception. Because of this, some commentators have concluded that he is offering both a direct and an indirect account, and there is really no good way to harmonize them. Others have suggested that in his earlier writings Reid is an indirect realist, with his theory of sensations as natural signs, while in his later works he is a direct realist who offers a noninferential account of the relationship between sensations and perception.

As we discussed in the last chapter, I think a key to understanding Reid's view lies in the question of whether perception is to

be viewed as involving a relational or a nonrelational act of mind. If it involves a relational act, then the kinds of problems mentioned above can occur, and Reid's account becomes very confusing. If, on the other hand, perception involves a nonrelational act of mind, Reid's account makes more sense. For him, the intentional core of mental acts, including perception, is conception, and his account of conception is clearly nonrelational. If we combine this with the distinction we made in the last chapter between two senses of perception (i.e. real and "seeming"), we can conclude that Reid is offering a form of the direct theory of perception. If this is the case, as I believe it is, then Reid's account is quite modern in its conception, and his writings need to be examined and studied further as an important forerunner to modern views of perception and intentionality.

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