COMMON SENSE IN REID'S RESPONSE TO SCEPTICISM

1. Introduction

Thomas Reid is one figure whose epistemological views are bound up with common sense. As with his positive theory, however, Reid's response to scepticism – what exactly it's meant to establish, and how – is a matter of controversy. Of course, insofar as it respects and defends our ordinary view of ourselves as having knowledge, and from a variety of sources, any response to scepticism is "commonsensical" in the broad sense. Notably, however, recent interpreters of Reid differ in what role if any they see common sense *itself* as playing in Reid's response to the sceptic – hence, in whether they think that response is commonsensical in some more substantive sense. Here, I shall argue that even those who do give common sense a place in Reid's defense of our pretheoretic epistemological views underrate the importance therein of common sense as Reid conceives of it. Specifically, they overlook the fact that common sense has an irreducible normative aspect for Reid, and that an adherence to the first principles of common sense is, for him, a minimum requirement on rational judgment and action, a requirement which even the sceptic cannot evade.

2. Reid's response to the sceptic: Some recent discussions

That common sense is central to Reid's epistemological views hardly seems worth saying. And yet, witness for example James Van Cleve's recent discussion of Reid's epistemology, in which common sense figures hardly at all[1]. As Van Cleve sees it, the key feature of Reid's epistemology is its *externalism*. Reid is usually seen as proposing a number of general "first principles" asserting (*i.a.*) the existence of various types of things – *e.g.*, the ostensible objects of consciousness, perception, and memory, as well as the reliability of the natural faculties. But Van Cleve thinks Reid is better read as offering a number of *epistemic principles* (or *principles of evidence*), principles stating that the particular deliverances of consciousness, memory, and perception, for example, have first principle status – *i.e.*, that they are justified or evident, independently of any other beliefs[2].

Thus read, Reid is an "*epistemological externalist* – someone who thinks that there are important knowledge-making factors that do their work regardless of whether they are themselves known" (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 317). For in order for the relevant beliefs to be justified, it need only be true, as Reid's epistemic principles state, that the "mere fact that a proposition is a deliverance of perception, memory, or consciousness suffices to make

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[1] "Common sense receives such scant attention in the book that it does not even earn an entry in the index" (Buras, 2018, p. 205). It comes up at p. 363 of Van Cleve's book, in connection with the question of how we could have immediate knowledge that (*e.g.*) sense perception is reliable. In general, however, Van Cleve is sceptical that such general and contingent things *can* be known immediately (see next note).

[2] He favors this reading in part because he thinks that the particular deliverances of the relevant faculties have a better claim to features Reid associates with first principles – *e.g.*, self- (or immediate) evidence and irresistibility (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 309-10). He also thinks that general "principles of truth" could do their work only by being enlisted as premises in reasoning, which has disastrous consequences (and also, is incompatible with externalism). For discussion and response, see Rysiew (2018b).

that proposition evident" (*ibid.*, p. 341). Thus, for these epistemic principles to contribute to our knowledge, "[w]e do not have to know that they are true; we simply have to fall under them" (*ibid.*, 310-11). Nor, for the same reason, do we need to know anything about the reliability of sense perception (*ibid.*, p. 341)[3].

According to Van Cleve, Reid's externalism has two advantages. First, it enables "bootstrapping" – *i.e.*, the use of arguments establishing the reliability of our faculties through the use of those very faculties. For if Reid's principles of evidence are correct, then particular deliverances of a faculty may be immediately evident, and so fit to serve as inputs to a "track-record" argument like the following:

> l. At t_1, I formed the perceptual belief that p, and p.
> 2. At t_2, I formed the perceptual belief that q, and q.
> (and so on)
> C. Therefore, sense perception is a reliable source of belief. (*ibid.*, p. 315)

Such arguments require a *reliance upon* the relevant faculties. (In the above argument, *e.g.*, 'p' and 'q' are token deliverances of perception.) And, plausibly, those faculties can yield knowledge only if they *are* reliable – hence, only if the conclusion of the argument is true. (So such arguments are "epistemically circular"; Alston, 1986.) But since the conclusion needn't be *known* to be true, there's no *vicious* circularity involved (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 313-16). Further, and as others[4] have noted, Reid himself seems to allow that we can "confirm" the trustworthiness of various faculties; what he denies is that their status as sources of evidence, or our confidence in them as such, is (or could be) owing to such an argument or to our *knowing* that they're reliable (*ibid.*, p. 318-19)[5].

Second, while the track-record arguments it enables are dialectically ineffective against the sceptic (*ibid.*, p. 316, n. 16), externalism remains the most powerful anti-sceptical feature of Reid's epistemology[6]. For externalism provides a response to the following sceptical dyad:

> (1) We can know that a deliverance of [a potential source of knowledge] K is true only if we first know that K is reliable.
> (2) We can know that K is reliable only if we first know, concerning certain of its

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[3] While most who read Reid as an externalist see him as some kind of reliabilist (*i.e.*, someone who thinks that reliability is central to the explication of some central epistemic concept (de Bary, 2002, p. 5)), Van Cleve prefers to read him as a *normativist*; that is, "someone for whom evidence (that is, the quality of being evident) is a normative category not logically tied to reliability, as in the epistemological writings of R. M. Chisholm" (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 323). This view is externalist because, since justifying factors needn't be reliably connected to the truth, they needn't be *known* to be such in order to do their work (*ibid.*, p. 340-41). (I'm much less sure than Van Cleve as to how comfortable such a reading of Reid is; see Rysiew (2018b).)

[4] *E.g.*, de Bary (2002, p. 152-60) and Lemos (2004, p. 74-6).

[5] It's for this type of reason that Reid thinks Descartes "makes a false step" (EIP 6, 5, p. 480): he raises a doubt as to the faculties' reliability then seeks to assuage it via argument (Thébert, 2015, p. 195, n. 2; cf. Lemos, 2004, p. 78, p. 84; Alston, 1985, p. 9). Whereas, Reid's remarks on "confirming" various first principles occur in contexts where no such doubts have been expressed; in such contexts, epistemic circularity is "benign" (Thébert, 2015, p. 205ff; Bergmann, 2004).

[6] Perceptual direct realism is neither necessary nor sufficient for avoiding scepticism (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 329-32); "naturalism" saves us only from unbelief (*ibid.*, p. 332-37); and nativism merely permits our having certain conceptions (*ibid.*, p. 53-6).

> deliverances, that they are true. (*ibid.*, p. 339)

In particular, externalism tells against (1), the KR ("knowledge of reliability") requirement. It thereby makes possible our knowing things, the knowing of which implies that the sceptic is wrong, even if we can't *show* that he's wrong (*ibid.*, p. 353)[7].

Van Cleve says little about what grounds the epistemic principles at the center of his reading of Reid[8]. But if they're true, then the deliverances of consciousness, memory, and perception, *e.g.*, are immediately (*prima facie*) evident or justified. And it's clear that, whether or not he thinks such particular beliefs (/propositions) count as first principles proper[9], that's Reid's view too. Then again, if the *sceptic* is correct, none of the relevant beliefs enjoy such a status. So it might seem that we've reached a stalemate, with no principled means of having things tip one way rather than the other.

Hence the importance of the other main element in Van Cleve's reconstruction of Reid's response to the sceptic – an argument that figures prominently in many commentators' discussions[10]. It's expressed (for example) in this well-known passage, in which Reid addresses the sceptic about perceptual knowledge:

> Reason, says the sceptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, Sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception; they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another? (IHM 6, 20, p. 169; Van Cleve, 2015, p. 352)

In a related passage (IHM 5, 7, p. 71), Van Cleve notes, Reid distinguishes between two kinds of sceptics: "total sceptics", who trust none of our natural faculties, and "semi-sceptics", who trust only one or two ("reason and perhaps also consciousness" (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 353)). The total sceptic, Reid says, must "be left to enjoy his skepticism" (EIP 6, 5, p. 480); before him, Van Cleve writes, "we must be silent" (Van Cleve, 2015,

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[7] In addition to giving no (explicit) role to common sense, Van Cleve says he isn't much concerned about preserving either the commonness (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 313, n. 13) or the 'principlehood' (*ibid.*, p. 312) of first principles.

[8] "It is a question of some moment what justifies such principles themselves; promulgating them may simply invite the charge that one is begging the question against the skeptic" (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 331). (Alston claims that "Chisholm *et al.* are, much of the time […] making explicit the structure of one or another common doxastic practice" (Alston, 1989, p. 12). But if so, articulating the relevant principles won't have obvious anti-sceptical force.) Van Cleve suggests that the epistemic principles he describes may be necessarily true; if so, they would (by his lights) be more plausibly immediately knowable, in spite of their generality, and so be better candidates for first principlehood themselves (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 323). However, just as some find Reid's claims about the self-evidentness of first principles implausible, some have doubts about whether epistemic principles of the sort Van Cleve discusses *are* necessary and/or immediately knowable.

[9] For some doubts, see Thébert (2015, p. 197-98) and Rysiew (2018b).

[10] In addition to those cited elsewhere in this paper, other discussions of this argument include Alston (1985, p. 445-46), DeRose (1989, p. 330-31), Lehrer (1989, p. 49-50, p. 68, p. 186-87), Plantinga (1993a, p. 100ff.), Pust (2013, p. 212-13) and Wolterstorff (2001, p. 197ff.). I should note too that there are other important discussions of the general themes addressed in this paper which I have not discussed here; these include Etchegaray (2013), Jaffro (2010), Schulthess (1983), and Thébert (2016).

p. 353). But semi-sceptics can "be charged with inconsistency, or at least arbitrariness. They trust some faculties but not others, with no real reason for doing so" (*ibid.*).

As presented by Van Cleve, the argument here – *the parity argument*, as we might call it – is merely negative: the semi-sceptic is inconsistent and faces a dilemma (Alston, 1985, p. 446). Implicit in Van Cleve's discussion, however, is a more positive moral, and one that's made explicit by John Greco[11] – who, unlike Van Cleve, gives attention to *common sense*.

Greco notes a familiar ambiguity in Reid's use of the term 'common sense' and suggests the following resolution: "'common sense' proper is a faculty of judgment (or perhaps a collection of faculties of judgment). 'The principles of common sense' and 'first principles' refer both to the judgments that issue from the faculty and the contents of these" (Greco, 2014, p. 144). According to Greco, the latter judgments "come in two varieties: particular and [*pace* Van Cleve] general" (*ibid.*). His claim is then that, for Reid, these principles have two kinds of 'priority', the first of which is epistemic:

> First principles have the status of non-inferential knowledge – they are known (or justified), but not on the basis of reasoning or inference from other things that are known (or justified). (*ibid.*, p. 145)

As Greco sees it, the epistemic priority of common sense follows from Reid's theory of evidence – specifically, from his "'proper function' faculty reliabilism" (Greco, 2004, p. 150; 2014, p. 149). According to Greco, Reid holds that when a belief arises "from the proper functioning of our natural, non-fallacious (*i.e.* reliable) cognitive faculties" (*ibid.*), it has (*prima facie*) positive epistemic status of the sort required for knowledge. And since first principles enjoy this status without grounding in further evidence – the "faculties that make up common sense (for example, perception, memory, consciousness)" are "non-inferential" – "they enjoy a kind of epistemological priority that is special to them; they are a kind of foundational knowledge, a kind of basic evidence" (Greco, 2014, p. 149).

So: Reid's theory of evidence yields a broad and moderate foundationalism, whereby we have lots of knowledge, from a variety of sources (Greco, 2004, p. 148). But, again, the sceptic has *her own* theory of evidence, whereby we don't. On what grounds might we prefer one of these theories of evidence over the other? For Greco, an "impasse" (*ibid.*, p. 151) is avoided because, in addition to having epistemic priority, the first principles of common sense have *methodological* "pride of place" (Greco, 2014, p. 149). Whereas the epistemic priority of the first principles is a matter of their having a special status in connection with the distinctively epistemic end of truth (true belief), their methodological priority has to do with their having a special status when it comes to "*the method by which we ought to proceed* in our theorizing" (*ibid.*, p. 146). Specifically:

[11] Van Cleve (2015, p. 353, n. 36) refers the reader to Greco's (2004) discussion.

> First principles have *prima facie* plausibility as pretheoretical starting points. They can be rejected by philosophical theory, but only on the basis of very strong considerations. (*ibid.*, p. 145-46)

That the first principles enjoy this type of methodological priority, Greco suggests, is established by a familiar elaboration upon the parity argument[12]. In particular, when undertaking an investigation into our cognitive faculties, there are three options available to us:

> (a) we may begin by trusting none of our faculties until we have reason for believing them trustworthy, (b) we may begin by trusting some of our faculties but not others, or (c) we may begin by trusting all of our faculties until we have reason for believing them untrustworthy. (*ibid.*, p. 149; 2004, p. 152)

Of these, the first option is a "non-starter" (Greco, 2014, p. 149); it's "pointless" (Greco, 2004, p. 153) and "goes nowhere" (*ibid.*, p. 152); for, without trusting any of our faculties, we could not even attempt the vindication which (a) demands – indeed, we couldn't theorize at all! The second option, as we saw above, is inconsistent. So the only option that's "both available and consistent" (Greco, 2014, p. 150) is to begin by trusting all of our faculties[13]. Greco writes: "this kind of constraint is *prima facie* and can be overridden – we should trust our faculties, including those of common sense, *until we have reason for doubting them*" (*ibid.*). In fact, however, Greco says, Reid thinks that "if we adopt this methodology […] we will find no reason to think that our cognitive faculties are not trustworthy" (Greco, 2004, p. 152).

Now, according to Terence Cuneo, the argument just rehearsed is doing *crucial, positive* epistemological work for Reid. Philip de Bary holds that "the Truth Claim" – that is, the claim that "[f]irst principles generate, if they are not themselves already, true beliefs" (de Bary, 2002, p. 65) – is something we either "buy" or we don't; it "is, and can only be, an externalist assumption [….] All Reid can do is to urge that the assumption is more 'reasonable' than any alternative assumption" (*ibid.*, p. 132). In response, Cuneo says that the trilemmic argument just rehearsed helps us do more than that[14]: *it shows* that "[t]he only reasonable methodology (*ab initio*, at least) is one that assumes that the outputs of our original belief forming faculties are innocent until proven guilty" (Cuneo, 2004, p. 198). In fact, Cuneo suggests, this argument is "the primary reason Reid offers in favor of accepting [the Truth Claim]" (*ibid.*, p. 199).

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[12] In Greco's 2004 (p. 151-54), the parity argument alone is presented as yielding the methodological priority of the first principles; in his 2014, Greco also cites the "ought implies can" idea, and the superior track record of philosophical theory underwritten by common sense (p. 150-51). I don't think that bringing in these further factors would substantially alter the discussion to follow.

[13] Compare Bonjour (2002, p. 265): "The commonsense conviction that beliefs about the external world are justified and do constitute knowledge creates a strong rational presumption that this view is correct and so that skepticism is wrong – rational because there is no rational alternative to a substantial reliance on common sense."

[14] De Bary, Cuneo says (2004, p. 199), mistakenly treats the trilemmic argument as directed only against Cartesian foundationalism.

I have two worries about Cuneo's position. First, Reid thinks that the non-fallaciousness of the faculties is a first principle[15], and that as such *no reason need be* offered for accepting it. (And, as Reid might say: if you're in real doubt about the Truth Claim, *no* argument can help.) There may be ways of "confirming" this belief. But to say that the trilemmic argument gives us "the primary reason" we have for accepting the non-fallaciousness of the faculties sounds rather unReidian. Second, it's not clear that the trilemmic argument yields an *epistemic* reason in favor of the Truth Claim – that is, an *evidential* or *truth-related* reason for supposing that (all of) our faculties are reliable. As presented by Greco, the argument is that we should trust all of our faculties because, if we want to theorize at all, there is no real and consistent alternative to doing so. However, insofar as it establishes that "we should trust [all of] our faculties" (Greco 2014, p. 150), this, it seems, is a *practical* 'should': if we're to engage in investigation at all, it's the only option that's both consistent and viable[16]. But a sceptic might agree to *that*: it's the *epistemic* standing of our common sense beliefs that he's questioning, not whether, as a practical matter, we should and perhaps must take them as starting points. So, as Alston at one point puts it, "it looks as if the judgment that [our doxastic practices are] 'rationally' engaged in has no bearing on the likelihood that [they] will yield truths; rationality has no 'truth-conductivity' force" (Alston, 1989, p. 20).

To be clear: this isn't meant as a criticism of Greco. Indeed, it's among the central points of his 2014 paper that we should clearly distinguish between the methodological and epistemic issues; and while he says that he regards Reid's (total[17]) response to the sceptic as "unanswerable" (Greco, 2004, p. 155), that's not because he thinks we've *shown* that scepticism is false, or that our common sense beliefs are justified. Further, it's obvious that Reid *does* regard "common sense beliefs" as having both of the types of priority Greco describes[18]. Still, according to some, if we end our discussion here, we'll be leaving out important elements of Reid's response to scepticism; and I agree.

As some see it, the important element we've yet to mention is a reliance upon theistic considerations. According to Norman Daniels, *e.g.*, "Reid justifies natively given 'common sense' beliefs through a dogmatic appeal to God as a non-deceiver" (Daniels, 1974, p. 117, p. 119-20; cf. Sosa, 2009, p. 74, n. 8). No doubt, Reid sees God's providence as *explaining why* we're in possession of reliable faculties. So too, it may be

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[15] The seventh first principle of contingent truths states: "That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious" (EIP 6, 5, p. 480). Reid writes that "in every instance of assent…the truth of our faculties is taken for granted, and is, as it were, one of the premises on which our assent is grounded." (EIP 6, 5, p. 481). The "as it were" is crucial: Reid's first principles don't typically function as premises from which we reason. Nor is Reid meaning here to endorse the KR requirement mentioned above. (For worries to that effect, see Van Cleve (2015, p. 342) and Lemos (2004, Ch. 4).) Other issues concerning first principle #7 are discussed in Rysiew (2014).

[16] The 'should' is practical in that it is grounded, not in evidential or truth-related considerations, but in considerations relating to the pursuit of certain practical aims or goals (satisfying desires, executing plans, etc.) -- the aim being, in this case, to investigate our cognitive faculties.

[17] That is, his methodology together with his rejection of the theory of ideas, and his theories of perception and evidence.

[18] Again (n. 2), some have doubted whether the general first principles could really be immediately justified ("self-evident"); others (including Wolterstorff, 2001) question whether they're things we all believe. For some discussion and response, see Rysiew (2005, 2017, 2018b).

Reid's view that providential considerations cohere with and *confirm* the trust we place in our faculties, thereby *enhancing* the relevant beliefs' justifiedness[19]. However, it's *much* less clear that their being justified essentially depends upon theistic considerations[20].

Another idea is this: above, it was claimed that, on its own, the trilemmic argument shows merely that it's practically rational to trust (all of) our faculties. But maybe this result has greater significance than we thought. Consider Alston's view. Like Van Cleve, Alston allows that epistemic circularity – wherein, again, the reliability of a source is taken for granted in arguing for its reliability – "does not render an argument useless for justifying or establishing its conclusion. [For example, p]rovided that I can *be* justified in certain perceptual beliefs without already being *justified* in supposing sense perception to be reliable,[…] I can legitimately use perceptual beliefs in an argument for the reliability of sense perception" (Alston, 1989, p. 3). So: *if* perception is reliable, we can use it *to show* that it is. Alston's concern, however – and the issue that arises in connection with scepticism – is whether we can "cancel out that *if*" (*ibid.*). And his *positive suggestion* is that the Reidian trilemma takes us closer to doing that than we've acknowledged[21]. For to "engage in a certain doxastic practice and to accept the beliefs one thereby generates is to commit oneself to those beliefs being true (at least for the most part), and hence to commit oneself to the practice's being reliable" (Alston, 1993, p. 132). Hence, in judging our doxastic practices *to be rational*, one commits oneself to its being rational to suppose *that they are reliable* (*ibid.*, p. 131; 1989, p. 21-2).

As others pointed out (Sosa, 1994; Lemos, 2004), however, and as Alston (2005, p. 221) later saw, this "practical argument" for the rationality of our doxastic practices falls into the sort of epistemic circularity he wishes to avoid – in presenting the argument, Alston takes the reliability of those practices for granted[22]. What's more, as Alston admits, there is "less than meets the eye" in his conclusion (Alston, 1993, p. 133). At most, we've shown that engaging in certain doxastic practices "is a reasonable thing to do, given our aims and situation. But then it is only that same practical rationality that carries over, via the commitment relation, to the judgment that [those practices are] reliable" (*ibid.*).

But perhaps a *practical* justification of the first principles is the most to which we can sensibly aspire. Thus, for example, Peter Baumann has argued that the only way that Reid can avoid both scepticism and dogmatism is by turning away from attempts to establish the *epistemic* justifiedness of the first principles and confining himself to merely *pragmatic* arguments[23]. While Baumann doesn't see any explicit endorsement of this strategy in Reid, he does think that Reid "is very close to this kind of pragmatism"

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[19] See, *e.g.*, Hookway (1990, 116); Poore (2015).
[20] See, *e.g.*, Rysiew (2002), DeRose (1989), Lehrer and Warner (2000), de Bary (2002, p. 187-88).
[21] While his aims aren't historical, Alston does think that the view he articulates is importantly Reidian.
[22] Cf. Reid: "Every kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties, amounts to no more than taking their own testimony for their veracity" (EIP 6, 5, p. 481).
[23] *E.g.*, "If the external world exists, then it is a more dangerous place for sceptics than for the followers of common sense. Given that we prefer not to break our noses, common sense is better off – given the existence of the external world – than scepticism. If the external world does not exist, then there is no difference between the two positions in terms of practical outcomes. Hence, common sense "dominates" scepticism" (Baumann, 2004, p. 75).

(Baumann, 1999, p. 53). But that's not at all clear – not least because, while Reid does in places appeal to the practical utility of the relevant beliefs, he *does* clearly regard the first principles as epistemically justified[24].

3. Restoring common sense

It was noted at the outset that a conspicuous feature of discussions of Reid's response to the sceptic is that they vary in how far they see common sense itself as playing any real role. In fact, among the interpretations we've considered, only Greco gives explicit attention to common sense. As I've said, I think that Greco is correct that Reid regards "common sense beliefs" as having both epistemic and methodological priority[25]. However, I think common sense plays a much more significant role for Reid and that it has a further, more fundamental type of normative authority than Greco's discussion suggests.

To start, recall Greco's suggestion that "'common sense' proper is a faculty of judgment (or perhaps a collection of faculties of judgment). 'The principles of common sense' and 'first principles' refer both to the judgments that issue from the faculty and the contents of these" (Greco, 2014, p. 144). And now note that the two kinds of priority Greco identifies attach to *the outputs* of the relevant faculty (/faculties) – to "*common sense beliefs*", both general and particular. The faculties which, for Greco, comprise common sense – perception, memory, consciousness – are epistemically relevant only insofar as they have as their function the reliable production of true belief. Similarly, for Greco's Reid, *evidence per se* doesn't really matter: "What matters is that however we form beliefs, they are formed in ways that are reliable" (Greco, 2002, p. 562). And what the trilemmic argument shows is that the only option that's both viable and consistent is to regard (initially) all of our natural belief-forming faculties as reliable.

Again, I think that this underrates, even misportrays, the significance of common sense for Reid. Colloquially, "common sense" most often refers to whatever's widely regarded as true ("vulgar opinion," as Reid sometimes calls it). But of course Reid has something narrower in mind. Reid and his critics often speak of common sense as a specific *subset* of our naturally held beliefs, or the things so believed; and this, again, is where Greco's focus lies. But even this isn't what's fundamental for Reid. For Reid, "sense" connotes *judgment*: "A man of sense is a man of judgment. Good sense is good judgment" (EIP 6, 2, p. 424). And common sense, Reid says, is "the first-born of reason": it is the "degree of reason" requisite for judging "of things self-evident," and entitling us "to the denomination of reasonable creatures" (EIP 6, 2, p. 433). Importantly, the type of reasonability that's at issue here is both epistemic and practical: the same "degree of understanding" that makes a person "capable of discovering what is true and what is false in matters that are self-evident, and which he distinctly apprehends," makes him "capable of acting with common prudence in the conduct of life" (EIP 6, 2, p. 426). So common sense doesn't merely issue in dry, intellectual verdicts as to the evidentness of various

[24] For discussion and criticism of pragmatic readings of Reid, see Rysiew (2015, 2017).

[25] While I agree that the relevant *particular* beliefs are immediately (non-inferentially) justified, I am not sure that Reid would count them as first principles proper (cf. n. 9). Henceforth, I'll be using 'first principles' to refer to the general principles Reid discusses.

things. In fact, Reid says that the first principles which common sense discovers are rarely "attended to, or made an object of thought"; but, thanks to our possessing common sense, they "produce[…] [their] effects" and "govern[…] [our] opinions" nonetheless (EIP 6, 5, p. 482)[26], enabling us to act prudently and to "converse and transact business" with others (EIP 6, 2, p. 424).

As to evidence, Reid says that it is "whatever is the ground of belief" (EIP 2, 20, p. 228); and that "all men of common understanding agree, that each [kind] of evidence [mnemonic, perceptual, etc.] may afford just ground of belief" (EIP 2, 20, p. 229). In support of a proper functionalist reading of Reid[27], he says that what the various forms of evidence have in common is that they "are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind" (EIP 2, 20, p. 229) – by which he clearly means the *sound* or *healthy* human mind[28]: "in most cases," he says, "we measure the degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding, when comprehended clearly and without prejudice" (EIP 7, 3, p. 557). Indeed, one way of understanding the first principles, at least the "epistemological sounding" (Van Cleve, 2015, p. 304) ones, is that they're intended to capture the effects that various forms of evidence have on normal (sane, healthy, minimally rational) humans – that is, on humans endowed with common sense -- , making evident and producing belief in the existence of various sorts of things (the ostensible objects of perception, memory, and consciousness, etc.). And, as Reid says, whenever one forms such a particular belief, one relies upon and implicitly trusts the relevant faculty, taking it for granted that it's reliable.

Putting these points together, it appears that common sense has an irreducible normative aspect for Reid: it's a specific capacity for judgment – namely, the minimum degree of reason required for being a reasonable creature, operating in both the epistemic and practical domains. Similarly, insofar as he's a proper functionalist, one might say that it's Reid's view that we have no conception of proper functioning that's independent of the first principles: we have no better handle on *good* judgment, *reasonable* belief, and *just grounds* of belief, than as believing in accordance with the first principles. In this way, as I've put it elsewhere (Rysiew, 2002), the first principles are *constitutive* principles: they are constitutive – for us, given our constitution – of minimally rational, healthy human cognizing; they typify, even define, what evidentness and good judgment as we think of them *are.* And common sense, "the first-born of reason" (EIP 6, 2, p. 433), has an irreducible normative aspect – it is the minimum standard for *good* judgment -- because it *just is* the power of the mind whereby we act and believe in accordance with these principles[29].

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[26] Reid speaks of our thought and conduct as manifesting an "implicit belief" (*e.g.*, IHM 1, 3, p. 17; 6, 20, p. 170; EAP 3, 1, 2, p. 87), "instinctive belief" (IHM 6, 20, p. 170; EAP 3, 1, 2, p. 86-7), "implied conviction" (EIP 6, 5, p. 479), "inward conviction" (EIP 6, 5, p. 482), and/or "implicit faith" (EIP 6, 5, p. 477) in the first principles.

[27] See Plantinga (1993b), Bergmann (2008), Greco (2004, 2014).

[28] I discuss this and other aspects of Reid's views on evidence in Rysiew (2005, 2011, 2018a).

[29] Of course, it does not follow that those principles, even if they are practically useful, are true. Even to judge that they are practically useful, however, requires that one take the reliability of at least some of one's faculties for granted. In this way, while practical utility does not entail truth, Reid would likely insist that *to suggest* that the first principles are merely practically useful would involve a form of inconsistency.

Importantly, to say that our conception of proper functioning is bound up with the first principles isn't an *alternative* to taking there to be a reliability constraint on warranted belief; the first principles themselves incorporate such an assumption or requirement, in the form of first principle #7 (see n. 15). So too, it's clear that Reid thinks that while a particular perceptual belief, say, is as such immediately justified (that it has "epistemic priority", in Greco's terms), that justification is defeasible and can be overridden: there can be reason to doubt that a token product of the faculties is true or, in the circumstances, reliably produced. But this too occurs against the background of the first principles and a general and most often only implicit belief in the reliability of the faculties[30].

With these points in mind, recall now that Greco takes the trilemmic argument to establish that the only option that's "both available and consistent" (Greco, 2014, p. 150) is to begin by trusting all of our faculties. He writes: "this kind of constraint is *prima facie* and can be overridden – we should trust our faculties, including those of common sense, *until we have reason for doubting them*" (*ibid.*, p. 150). While, Greco says, "there is no absolute bar to violating common sense" (*ibid.*, p. 147), Reid thinks that "if we adopt this methodology […] we will find no reason to think that our cognitive faculties are not trustworthy" (Greco, 2004, p. 152).

But it's not merely, for Reid, that we *won't* find reason to think that our faculties aren't trustworthy (or that the first principles are false). *Particular deliverances* of the faculties can be found to be false or unjustified. And yet, while their reliability is merely contingent, there's a sense in which we *couldn't* discover that the faculties themselves are untrustworthy (or the first principles false). For any evidence as to the fallaciousness of some or all of the faculties (or the falsity of one or more first principle) would have to presume the reliability (/truth) of at least one of them. However, since the faculties (/first principles) are on a par – since they come "out of the same shop" (IHM 6, 20, p. 169), and "stand[…] upon the same footing" (EIP 6, 4, p. 463) – the giving of such evidence would undermine the attempted argument. In this way, though the first principles are merely contingently true, and though we can be wrong about whether something *is* a first principle, there's a sense in which there *couldn't be* any reasonable (evidence-based) doubt as to the truth of the first principles or the general reliability of our faculties.

So, the semi-sceptic *is* being inconsistent. However, trusting (*ab initio*) all of the relevant faculties is not merely methodologically necessary and practically rational, but what *epistemic* rationality requires. This isn't just because we can't help having the relevant beliefs. (That can be true of manifestly *irrational* beliefs.) And it's not just because (suppose) the first principles are immediately justified or evident. (A given perceptual belief, say, might have *that* status while being known to be false or on balance unjustified.) Rather, it's because of the first principles' special shared status as the "fixed

[30] There may, then, be no way of specifying the circumstances that are "proper" (EIP 2, 20, p. 229) for the operation of our natural faculties that is completely independent of our common sense judgments, including our judgments about the first principles and the general reliability of our faculties. But this is to be expected, if the first principles really are foundational in the manner described here.

point[s]" upon which our cognizing rests (EIP 6, 4, p. 454) – the equally minimal requirements on 'healthy' human thinking. As to the *total* sceptic, it's not *just* that "before them we must be silent", as Van Cleve (2015, p. 353) puts it. In the nature of the case, and by their own lights, the total sceptic's position is not just "pointless" (Greco, 2004, p. 153), but *groundless*; in Reid's view, it is either insincere or one or another kind of madness (*e.g.*, EIP 7, 4, p. 563; IHM 7, p. 215-16).

Is this view "dogmatic"? Not if dogmatism involves a lack of critical reflectiveness and/or an insensitivity to reasoned argument. Reid critically examines many widely held beliefs, and many natural biases of the understanding (*e.g.*, EIP 6, 8); also, he asks the reader to consider whether his list of first principles is accurate and complete (EIP 6, 5, p. 468). Further, as Greco notes (2002, p. 560), Reid carefully considers various sceptical arguments but finds them wanting, giving reasons for that assessment. Finally, insofar as common sense is the minimum degree of reason necessary for epistemic and practical rationality, it is Reid's defense of common sense against sceptical attack that respects what reason requires.[31]

Does this, and Reid's view generally, "beg the question" against the sceptic? In arguing as he does, Reid does of course take for granted the reliability of his faculties and the reasonableness of his beliefs. But then, it's part of Reid's point that the sceptic's propounding *her* views, and her action generally, displays an equal such confidence, and an implicit acceptance of the very same fundamental normative standards that common sense and the first principles constitute or provide. And in any case, as I read Reid, the trilemmic argument, and Reid's anti-sceptical arguments as a whole, aren't meant to *show* that the faculties are trustworthy, or that the first principles are true. Rather, they're part of the project of placing them "in a proper point of view" (EIP 1, 2, p. 41), 'illustrating' (*ibid.*) their special (constitutive) role and standing[32].

4. Conclusion

Thomas Reid is one figure whose epistemological views are bound up with common sense. And yet, as we've seen, contemporary discussions of those views, including Reid's response to the sceptic, tend not to assign common sense itself any crucial role; and, I've argued, those who do give common sense a place in Reid's defense of our pretheoretic epistemological views don't do justice to Reid's specific conception thereof. As a result, Reid's response to the sceptic emerges as commonsensical only in the broad (and not very interesting) sense that it respects and defends our ordinary view of ourselves as

[31] "It is absurd to conceive that there can be any opposition between reason and common sense. It is indeed the first-born of reason; and, as they are commonly joined together in speech and in writing, they are inseparable in their nature" (EIP 6, 2, p. 432-33).

[32] It's worth noting that the parity argument (as I've called it) is among the means by which, according to Reid, we can distinguish genuine first principles "from vulgar errors or prejudices" (EIP 6, 4, p. 467): "It is a good argument *ad hominem*, if it can be shewn that a first principle which a man rejects, stands upon the same footing with others which he admits: for, when this is the case, he must be guilty of an inconsistency who holds the one and rejects the other" (EIP 6, 4, p. 463). Of course, if first principles can only be true (Greco, 2002, p. 555, n. 12), evidence that something is a first principle is also (indirectly) evidence that it is true. But Reid doesn't mean to be arguing for the truth of the first principles on such grounds – not, at least, if the aim is to resolve any doubt as to their truth (cf. n. 5).

having plenty of knowledge, and from a variety of sources. By contrast, on the view presented here, Reid's specific conception of common sense – namely, as a (shared) capacity for good judgment, operating in both thought and action, and entitling us "to the denomination of reasonable creatures" (EIP 6, 2, p. 433) – plays a central role in his epistemology; and his response to the sceptic is commonsensical in a much more substantive sense. Common sense has an irreducible normative aspect for Reid; and an adherence to the first principles of common sense is, for him, a minimum requirement on rational judgment and action, a requirement which even the sceptic cannot evade[33,34].

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[33] In other work (Rysiew, 2015, 2017), I have suggested that similar ideas can be found in both American pragmatism and the later Wittgenstein (see Rysiew, 2015, 2017).

[34] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Nantes Common Sense Epistemology conference (June 19-20, 2018). My thanks to other conference participants and attendees, to two anonymous reviewers for this journal, and especially to Angélique Thébert.

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