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REID AND EPISTEMIC NATURALISM

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Central to the contemporary dispute over 'naturalizing epistemology' is the question of the continuity of epistemology with science, i.e., how far purely descriptive, psychological matters can or should inform the traditional evaluative epistemological enterprise. Thus all parties tend to agree that the distinction between psychology and epistemology corresponds to a firm fact/value distinction. This is something Reid denies with respect to the first principles of common sense: while insisting on the continuity of epistemology with the rest of science, he does not wish to derive an 'ought' from an 'is', nor to reduce the epistemological to the psychological. His view is that the first principles are constitutive principles, hence that they are simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive, and thus that with regard to them there is in this sense simply no fact/value gap to be bridged.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to James Maffie, the debate over 'naturalized epistemology' centres on the question of the continuity of epistemology and science:

Naturalists are united by a shared commitment to the continuity of epistemology and science. Naturalist and non-naturalist divide over whether or not the continuity exists.¹

But if we take the dispute between epistemic naturalists and non-naturalists in this way (not that we should do so, as will emerge later), it seems clear that Reid would see himself as falling into the former camp. After all, among other things, Reid professes a staunch Newtonianism:

Let us, therefore, lay down this as a fundamental principle in our inquiries into the structure of the human mind and its operations – that no regard is due to the conjectures and hypotheses of philosophers.... Let us accustom ourselves to try every opinion by the touchstone of fact and experience.²

¹ J. Maffie, 'Recent Work on Naturalized Epistemology', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1990), pp. 281–93, at p. 281.

² Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* (henceforward *IP*) I iii, in *Thomas Reid: Philosophical Works*, ed. W. Hamilton, 8th edn (Berlin: Georg Olms, 1885), p. 236a.

Indeed, as Norman Daniels, for example, sees it, Reid's 'experimentalist orientation' in carrying out his 'analysis of the human faculties'³ shows that he is quite good about practising what he preaches; in fact Daniels thinks that Reid's work should be seen as 'a precursor to recent work in cognitive psychology and "naturalized epistemology"'.⁴

Yet Daniels himself in the very same book also claims that Reid attempts to establish the reliability of our faculties by means of a dogmatic appeal to God's providence: 'Reid's only defence against the sceptical outcome of his own nativism – namely, that our constitutions might lead us to systematically false beliefs – is his belief that God would not deceive us.... Reid justifies natively given "common sense" beliefs through a dogmatic appeal to God as a non-deceiver' (Daniels, 1st edn, pp. 117, 119–20). As Daniels later realized (afterword to his 2nd edn, esp. pp. 132–3), this hardly sits well with the portrayal of Reid as a staunchly naturalistic 'scientist of the mind' (p. 133). But Daniels is not alone in thinking that Reid's epistemology is somehow essentially theistic. According to Derek Brookes and others, while perhaps naturalistic enough in its methodology, Reid's epistemology contains and/or requires commitment to the existence and providence of God.⁵ This makes one wonder whether, on this reading, Reid's epistemology really is naturalistic after all. I am not convinced that he endorses a *providentialist* epistemology: as I read him, he makes no essential appeal to God in his epistemology, for instance, in defending the rationality of our common sense beliefs. This is not to say, however, that I see Reid as fitting comfortably with contemporary epistemic naturalisms – not because he is obviously a non-naturalist, but because he appears to reject an assumption shared by many on each side in the contemporary epistemological debate between naturalists, non-naturalists and anti-naturalists. Just what this assumption is, and why Reid rejects it, will be taken up below. But first I shall briefly address the matter of Reid and 'providential naturalism'.

II. CARTESIAN APPEALS AND PLANTINGA'S CHALLENGE

Reid was well aware of the question-begging character of appealing to God in defending the reliability of our faculties. Indeed, he takes Descartes to task on just this count.

³ Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind* (hereafter *Inq*), ed. Hamilton, I ii, p. 99a.

⁴ N. Daniels, *Thomas Reid's 'Inquiry': the Geometry of Visibles and the Case for Realism*, 2nd edn (Stanford UP, 1989), pp. xi, 133.

⁵ D.R. Brookes, in his edition of Reid's *Inquiry* (Pennsylvania State UP, 1997). The claim has also been recently endorsed by K. Haakonssen (ed.), *Practical Ethics* (Princeton UP, 1990), and P.B. Wood (ed.), *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation* (Pennsylvania State UP, 1996).

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

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

For, if our faculties be fallacious, why may they not deceive us in this reasoning as well as in others?⁶

Still, according to Brookes (p. xiv), Reid did endorse ‘providential naturalism’, a view comprised of the following four tenets:

1. Adherence to Newton’s *regulae philosophandi*
2. Belief that the ultimate explanation of the laws of nature is to be found in God’s providence
3. A teleological orientation in discovering those laws
4. Belief that the end/purpose of our cognitive processes is (among other things) to furnish us with true beliefs.

As Brookes sees it, while Reid makes no Cartesian-style appeal to God’s providence in *arguing* for the reliability of our faculties, it is Reid’s view that ‘the *rationality* of [our belief in the general reliability of our faculties] is best sustained within the context of providential naturalism’ (p. xxii) – that is, by (among other things) belief in God. Brookes continues:

For on this account, there is no reason to believe that scepticism about the external world is a live possibility. Providential naturalism is a philosophical system, a set of beliefs of which no member either affirms or leads to the denial of the reliability of our faculties – a feature, Reid argued, that could not be claimed of a system such as David Hume’s.

It is hardly clear to me that Reid was a ‘providential naturalist’ in quite the way Brookes here suggests. Why the qualification? Because, strictly speaking, even if Brookes is right in portraying Reid as an adherent of providential naturalism as described above, i.e., of the view comprised of tenets (1)–(4), that would at most have Reid giving God’s providence an *explanatory* role in accounting for the source of (among other things) our faculties and our belief in their basic reliability. But from that nothing whatever follows about whether providentialist considerations play any *justificatory* role in Reid’s defence of the rationality of such beliefs. What is more, the passage

⁶ *IP* VI v, p. 447b; cf. K. DeRose, ‘Reid’s Anti-Sensationalism and his Realism’, *Philosophical Review*, 98 (1989), pp. 313–48, at pp. 327–8.

just cited ('For on this account ...') is a very close paraphrase not of anything in Reid, but of Alvin Plantinga's recent claims to a similar effect:

[If] you find yourself with the doubt that our cognitive faculties produce truth ... you can't quell that doubt by producing an argument about God and his veracity, or indeed any argument at all; for the argument, of course, will be under as much suspicion as its source. Here no argument will help you; here salvation will have to be by grace, not by works. But the theist has nothing impelling him in the direction of such scepticism in the first place; no element of his noetic system points in that direction; there are no propositions he already accepts just by way of being a theist, which together with forms of reasoning ... lead to the rejection of the belief that our cognitive faculties have the apprehension of truth as their purpose and for the most part fulfil that purpose.⁷

Ergo, according to Plantinga, 'naturalistic epistemology flourishes best in the garden of supernaturalistic metaphysics' (*WPF*, p. 237); 'The right way to be a naturalist in epistemology is to be a supernaturalist in metaphysics' (p. 211).

What is the thinking behind these claims? In a nutshell, Plantinga's view is that knowledge requires warrant, warrant being that normative/evaluative element which, when added (in sufficient degree) to true belief, gives the bearer knowledge.⁸ But warrant involves proper functioning, Plantinga argues; and there is simply no plausible naturalistic account of proper functioning in the offing, nor therefore of the normative dimension of knowing. In fact, he claims, in opposition to 'Darwinian optimists' such as Quine, Fodor, Dennett, Goldman, Lycan and Millikan,⁹ natural selection actually makes it *very unlikely* that most of our beliefs are true, or that our faculties are generally reliable. So the naturalist who believes that we are the products of natural selection ought for that very reason to regard this belief as suspect.¹⁰ In this way a thoroughgoing naturalism destroys itself, engendering as it does, Plantinga thinks, this sort of irrationality and incoherence: 'Naturalistic epistemology conjoined with naturalistic metaphysics leads via evolution to scepticism or to violations of canons of rationality' (*WPF*, p. 237).

Again this is Plantinga's view. But Brookes implies that the only difference Reid saw between his system of belief and Hume's – that what Reid thought gave Hume's 'system', but not his own, a natural impulse towards scepticism – was that he, Reid, was a theist; and this is just false. Most

⁷ Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford UP, 1993, hereafter *WPF*), p. 105.

⁸ See Plantinga, *Warrant: the Current Debate* (Oxford UP, 1993), p. 3.

⁹ For a sample of the relevant claims, see S. Stich, *The Fragmentation of Reason* (MIT Press, 1990), pp. 55ff. Here are a couple: 'Natural selection guarantees that organisms either know the elements of logic or become posthumous' (Fodor); 'Natural selection guarantees that *most* of an organism's beliefs will be true, *most* of its strategies rational' (Dennett).

¹⁰ See *WPF*, pp. 218–19, for Patricia Churchland's and Darwin's own worries to this effect.

centrally, Reid rejects, while Hume accepts, what the former described as ‘the ideal theory’, the view that all the mind is immediately acquainted with are its own ‘perceptions’ (‘ideas’, ‘impressions’, etc.). And it is ‘the ideal theory’, and that alone, which Reid regards as the principle upon which ‘Hume’s sceptical system’ is built (see esp. ‘Dedication’ to *Inq.*, p. 96a). Whereas to say that Reid held that the rationality of our belief in the reliability of our faculties is ‘best sustained’ by (among other things) a belief in God is most naturally taken as implying that Reid thought that without the help of theism, believing one’s faculties not to be fallacious is less than fully rational. But that seems to me not to be Reid’s view at all; and taking it to be such underrates the strength and intended force of his response to the sceptic. (Of which, more presently.) So, as a purely interpretative question, whether or not Reid accepted providential naturalism in the sense of theses (1)–(4), above, and thus whatever explanatory role Reid accorded to God, I doubt very much that Reid’s is a ‘providentialist epistemology’ in the way in which Plantinga’s ultimately is. (I say ‘ultimately’ because, as Plantinga says, up to the final discussion of naturalism in *Warrant and Proper Function* his account of proper functionalism is thoroughly naturalistic: his claim that ‘The right way to be a naturalist in epistemology is to be a supernaturalist in metaphysics’ comes after that.)¹¹

But that leaves Plantinga’s challenge: how might *thoroughgoing* epistemic naturalists introduce into their picture epistemic normativity and the rationality of, e.g., belief in the reliability of our faculties? Here I shall present what I take to be Reid’s proposed way of responding to this challenge. Still, quite apart from the role God does or, as I see it, does not play in Reid’s epistemology, as already mentioned, I think that his epistemological views sit ill with contemporary discussions of epistemic naturalism. But to make this clear I shall need first to review briefly some of the central features of Reid’s position.

III. REID ON COMMON SENSE AND THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

According to Reid, ‘sense’ is closely connected with, or connotes, judgement and cogitation: ‘in common language, sense always implies judgement. A man of sense is a man of judgement. Good sense is good judgement’ (*IP* VI ii, p. 421b). This is not to say that, as Reid would have it, ‘common sense’

¹¹ For rejections of Brookes’ reading of Reid, see D.D. Todd, ‘An Inquiry into Thomas Reid’, *Dialogue*, 39 (2000), pp. 381–8; Daniels; DeRose; K. Lehrer, ‘Reid on Primary and Secondary Qualities’, *Monist*, 61 (1978), pp. 184–91, and ‘Reid, God and Epistemology’, co-authored with B. Warner, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 74 (2000), pp. 357–72.

and 'reason' are co-extensive terms. The relation between reason and common sense, rather, is as follows: 'We ascribe to reason two offices, or two degrees. The first is to judge of things self-evident; the second to draw conclusions that are not self-evident from those that are. The first of these is the province, and the sole province, of common sense' (*IP* VI ii, p. 425b). Thus, for Reid, common sense is a *degree* of reason; specifically, it is that degree of reason which is requisite for judging 'of things self-evident', and which entitles humans 'to the denomination of reasonable creatures' (*ibid.*).

For Reid, then, 'common sense' itself is not a purely descriptive notion (it suggests reasonableness, for instance).¹² Also worth noting is the fact that it is not Reid's view that common sense operates only at the level of ratiocination or 'intellection' – it is not, in effect, that an individual must be capable of sophisticated or extended reasoning in order to be called 'a reasonable creature'. (Non-logicians can be reasonable creatures.) A reasonable person, rather, is one who is 'capable of managing his own affairs, and answerable for his conduct towards others' (*ibid.*). So, on Reid's account, common sense is just as operative at the practical level as it is at the level of reasoning or ratiocination: 'Common sense is that degree of judgement which is common to men with whom we can converse and transact business' (*IP* VI ii, p. 421b). For Reid, common sense straddles – indeed, it *unifies* – the theory/practice distinction: 'The same degree of understanding which makes a man capable of acting with common prudence in the conduct of life, makes him capable of discovering what is true and what is false in matters that are self-evident, and which he distinctly apprehends' (*IP* VI ii, p. 422b).

As Nicolas Wolterstorff has recently argued, it is not always easy to reconcile all of the various things Reid says about common sense.¹³ Thus, for instance, from the passages just cited, it appears that Reid conceives of common sense as an instinctive faculty with which we are naturally endowed. In his later writings, however, Reid more often speaks of common sense as though it were a set of epistemically basic propositions. But perhaps we can go some way towards bringing into line these two conceptions of common sense if we think of the matter as follows: we can think of common sense as the faculty which gives rise to a set of basic propositions or beliefs. In any case, in considering Reid's epistemology, it is appropriate for us to focus on that feature of common sense (or that way of conceiving of common sense) which Reid himself stresses in his mature work, i.e., common sense as a set of basic beliefs or fundamental propositions which

¹² Similarly, the German '*gesunder Menschenverstand*', often rendered as 'common sense', literally translated means 'healthy human understanding'.

¹³ N. Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge UP, 2001), pp. 218–27.

serve as the foundation for all human thought, action and knowledge (cf. *IP* VI iv, p. 435a).

Reid divides these first principles of common sense into two groups: the first principles of necessary truths, and those of contingent truths. Since it is the epistemic status of the latter (i.e., the contingent ones) that is called into question by the sceptic, I shall focus my discussion on them.

Among the first principles of contingent truths are the following: (1) that the things of which I am conscious do exist; (3) that those things did really happen which I distinctly remember; (5) that those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be; and (7) that the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious (*IP* VI v, pp. 441a–52a).

Like Hume, Reid holds that one cannot help assenting to these propositions. He writes, for example, that ‘Philosophy was never able to conquer that natural belief which men have in their senses’ (*IP* II iv, p. 259b); ‘[a] man may as soon, by reasoning, pull the moon out of her orbit, as destroy the belief of the objects of sense’ (*IP* IV x, p. 328a). Or again: a person ‘may struggle hard to disbelieve the information of his senses, as a man does to swim against the torrent; but ah! it is in vain.... For, after all, when his strength is spent in the fruitless attempt, he will be carried down the torrent with the common herd of believers’ (*Inq* VI xx, p. 184a).

Citing such passages, Wolterstorff has remarked that these words of Reid’s are ‘so far from contradicting Hume’s position as to do nicely as a statement of it’.¹⁴ And having noted that this last metaphorical description of the irresistibility of our common sense beliefs ‘could in its entirety have been written by Hume’, he goes on to quote approvingly, as Galen Strawson has recently done,¹⁵ the famous (1812) exchange in which James Mackintosh

... remarked to Thomas Brown that on the question of the existence of the external world Reid and Hume ‘differed more in words than in opinion’. ‘Yes,’ answered Brown. ‘Reid bawled out, We must believe an outward world; but added in a whisper, We can give no reason for our belief. Hume cries out, We can give no reason for such a notion; and whispers, I own we cannot get rid of it.’

Though Wolterstorff (like Strawson) is certainly correct that both Hume and Reid hold that our common sense beliefs are irresistible, and though it is true that Reid and Hume each subscribes to *some* sort of nativist view, Wolterstorff and Strawson are both too quick in concluding from this that Reid and Hume ‘differed more in words than in opinion’. Here Paul Vernier provides a more accurate assessment of the situation:

¹⁴ Wolterstorff, ‘Hume and Reid’, *Monist*, 70 (1987), pp. 398–417, at p. 400.

¹⁵ G. Strawson, ‘What’s so Good about Reid?’, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 12 No. 4, 22 February 1990, pp. 14–15.

There is no disagreement on the irresistibility of [for example] our everyday belief in objective reality between Hume and Reid, only about whether there are philosophical grounds for it.... The real issue is this: although we are compelled in practical circumstances to accept these [common sense] beliefs, have we any justificatory grounds for them?¹⁶

It is over *this* question that Reid and Hume differ.

Like Hume, Reid fully accepts that the contingent basic beliefs of common sense cannot without circularity be given demonstrative proof. After all, it is 'contrary to the nature of first principles to admit of direct or *apodictical* proof' (*IP* VI iv, p. 439a); the idea of demonstration from something *more* basic is quite simply in conflict with the rock-bottom status of our basic beliefs (cf. *IP* I ii, p. 231a). In addition to thus ruling out any deductive arguments for the first principles, Reid also discounts the relevance of inductive support, and hence the prospect of appealing to probabilistic reasoning (*IP* VI iv, pp. 434a–5b). And yet, while Hume takes it to be an epistemological defect of our common sense beliefs that they can neither be given demonstrative proof nor be the product of empirical generalization – though this is not necessarily a bad thing, all things considered – Reid maintains that the impossibility of *directly* arguing for the contingent first principles of common sense is no barrier to justification of a sort that is satisfactory to reason. (Nothing I say here commits me to reading Hume as an out-and-out sceptic. For my purposes, it may well be true that his intent is to 'put reason in its place' – to show that belief is more properly a part of the 'sensitive' rather than the cogitative part of our nature.)

Of first principles, Reid writes 'Their evidence is not demonstrative, but intuitive. They require not proof, but to be placed in a proper point of view' (*IP* I ii, p. 231b); 'they may admit of illustration, yet being self-evident, do not admit of proof' (p. 231a); 'there are certain ways of reasoning even about them, by which those that are just and solid may be confirmed, and those that are false may be detected' (*IP* VI iv, p. 439a). By 'confirmation' here, Reid cannot and does not mean proof by appeal to external evidence; for first principles are supposed to be *self*-evident. What Reid is claiming, rather, is that it is possible to confirm that certain principles *are first principles*. As the appeal to external evidence has already been ruled out, the confirmation cannot take the form of direct justification, and must instead consist in the indirect justification of a first principle.

According to Reid, so long as one's judgement has not been 'perverted, by education, by authority, by party zeal, or by some other of the common

¹⁶ P. Vernier, 'Thomas Reid on the Foundations of Knowledge and his Answer to Skepticism', in S. Barker and T.L. Beauchamp (eds), *Thomas Reid: Critical Interpretations* (Temple UP, 1976), pp. 14–24, at p. 19.

causes of error' (*IP* VI iv, p. 438a), there are (at least) five types of argument which can be used in non-evidence-based confirmations of first principles. These strategies are: (1) an 'argument *ad hominem*', showing some inconsistency in the denial of one first principle on the basis of another which is on the same epistemic footing; (2) an informal *reductio ad absurdum*, whereby denial of the first principle in question is shown to lead to absurdity; (3) an argument from the consent of the learned and unlearned across time; (3a) an argument from the common structure of all languages; (4) an argument from the *prima facie* primitiveness of some first principles; and (5) an argument from the practical indispensability of a first principle (*IP* VI iv, pp. 439a–41b).

To repeat, these are strategies for defending first principles as first principles, and are not intended as arguments for their truth. Reid himself admits at several points that it is (logically) possible that our foundational beliefs are false. Of the idea that our sensations suggest something external, for example, he writes 'The belief of it, and the very conception of it, are equally parts of our constitution. If we are deceived in it, we are deceived by Him that made us, and there is no remedy' (*Inq* V vii, p. 130b); 'we must [trust the testimony of our faculties] implicitly, until God gives us new faculties to sit in judgement upon the old' (*IP* VI v, p. 447b; cf. VII iv, pp. 488b, 486a). Here, though, the point is not that we should despair of our inability to demonstrate the truth of our first principles; it is rather that it is a mistake to seek the impossibility of error with regard to them.

There is, for Reid, a presumption in favour of the truth of our first principles – they are, so to speak, innocent until proved guilty. Keith DeRose (pp. 326–32) has proposed that we should understand Reid's argument here thus. With respect to our native belief-forming faculties, we have three choices: (1) beginning with an attitude of trust towards them all; (2) regarding them all as suspect (until they can be proved innocent); and (3) beginning by regarding only some of them as trustworthy, and going on from there. Of these, in Reid's view, only the first option (trusting them all) makes sense.¹⁷ The second (distrusting them all) is not only psychologically impossible; *of necessity* it is pointless, for why should we distrust them all, unless we take ourselves to have some reason for doing so? How could we take ourselves to have such a reason unless we were trusting at least some of them? And the third (trusting only some) is of necessity arbitrary: why trust only one – reason, say – when the others are equally a part of our constitution,

¹⁷ Reid distinguishes between 'thorough and consistent' sceptics and 'semi-sceptics' – the former being those who adopt (2), the latter (3). Were we ever to encounter a total sceptic, Reid says, we would have to '[leave him] to enjoy his scepticism' (*IP* VI v, p. 447b; cf. *Inq* V vii, p. 130a).

and when any argument for the trustworthiness of reason would have to assume what is at issue?

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; if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another? (*Inq* VI xx, p. 183b)

The only reasonable strategy is to begin by placing trust in *all* of the first principles, in all of one's natural (truth-orientated) faculties. First principle (7) speaks to the reliability of the natural faculties 'by which we distinguish truth from error'.

Of course it is, once again, (logically) possible that all of our basic beliefs are mistaken – this is a trivial point that applies to all contingent propositions; but it is equally (and just as trivially, logically) possible that our basic common sense beliefs are entirely correct. So logical possibilities do not tell us anything here: in effect, they cancel each other out, and we are left with the question of whether we have any *reasonable* grounds – not whether we have any *possible* grounds – for doubting the veracity of the first principles of common sense.

But for Reid, reasonable or rational doubt is evidence-based doubt, and the 'mere logical possibility that some contingent propositions are false (that there are other minds, that there is an external world etc.) is not only not good evidence that such propositions are false, or even might be: it is no evidence at all'.¹⁸ So it is only if we take infallibility to be a necessary condition for certainty that we shall be led to suppose that certainty about the truth of our common sense beliefs cannot be had. For Reid, though, 'logical certainty' – certainty where it is impossible that one might be mistaken – attaches only to necessary truths; with respect to contingent propositions, including, of course, the contingent first principles of common sense, the best we could possibly hope for is 'epistemic certainty', or the complete absence of any reasonable doubt as to their truth.¹⁹ And this, Reid thinks, is exactly what we do have: in the absence of any reasonable (i.e., evidence-based) doubt as to their truth, we have no reasonable alternative to the dictates of common sense. And since any evidence as to the fallaciousness of one or all of our faculties would have to presume the veracity of at least one of them, given that the first principles 'all come out of the same shop' (*Inq* VI xx, p. 183b, cf. strategy (1) above), that evidence would in fact undermine the attempted argument. In this sense, there *could not be* any reasonable

¹⁸ D.D. Todd, 'A Reply to Strawson's "What's so Good about Reid?"', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 12 No. 7, 5 April 1990, p. 4.

¹⁹ Here I am drawing especially on what Reid says in *IP* VII iii, 'Of Probable Reasoning' (pp. 481b–4a).

(evidence-based) doubt as to the truth of the first principles. So since it is perfectly rational to act on and believe that to which there is no reasonable alternative (never mind *could not* be any), it is perfectly rational for us to hold to the first principles of common sense. Indeed, when to the fact that we (do or could) have no *reasonable* alternative to our basic beliefs we add the further observation that they are irresistible, it becomes clear that we have no alternative to them *whatsoever*.

Thus I do not see that scepticism is a 'live possibility' (Brookes, p. xxii) for Reid, or that he thinks that the rationality of belief in the veracity of our faculties requires metaphysical supernaturalism: '... the unjust *live by faith*, as well as the *just*' ('Dedication' to *Inq*, p. 95b), Reid says; rejecting or 'accepting God's goodness as a reason for trusting in one's faculties presupposes, if nothing else, one's faculty of reason' (Wolterstorff, p. 212; cf. Lehrer, pp. 367–72). '*Every* kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties, amounts to no more than taking their own testimony for veracity' (*IP* VI v, p. 447b; my italics). Until we are given new faculties to sit in judgement on the old, we all not only must, but ought to, trust the ones we have. If Reid is correct in holding that common sense is a degree of reason, then the first principles of common sense are *ipso facto* dictates of reason.

IV. THE FIRST PRINCIPLES AS CONSTITUTIVE PRINCIPLES

I have spent the last several pages reconstructing Reid's defence of the first principles of contingent truths; and it should go without saying that I believe that in doing so I have remained faithful to Reid's views. None the less it is also my view that we have yet to get at the heart of Reid's defence of common sense. So I shall consider again DeRose's reconstruction of Reid's argument (Wolterstorff, ch. 8, presents Reid's response to the sceptic in very similar terms). What he takes it to be is as follows. With respect to our native belief-forming faculties, we have three choices: we can trust them all, trust none, or trust only some; the second is of necessity pointless, and the third is arbitrary; only the first seems viable; hence we ought to accept all of the first principles.

I believe that, taken on its own terms, this reconstruction of (a portion of) Reid's response to the sceptic is accurate enough. But if we are to understand the real character of his defence of the first principles, we must be cautious about how exactly we regard arguments such as this. Specifically, we must guard against thinking that the foregoing argument (or something like it) *just is* 'Reid's argument for the rationality of our common sense beliefs'. For one thing, the preceding argument seems to be an attempt to

derive an 'ought' from an 'is', amounting to 'Unlike the first option, the second and third options are each untenable; hence we ought to trust all of our natural faculties'. Not that this feature would be universally regarded as sufficient reason to reject it.²⁰ But it cannot be the sort of argument that Reid intends. This is shown by what he says in response to Hume's challenge that some reason be given for 'how this new relation [i.e., an "ought"] can be a deduction from others which are entirely different from it [i.e., some set of purely descriptive statements]':

This is to demand a reason for what does not exist. The first principles ... are not deductions. They are self-evident; and their truth, like that of other axioms, is perceived without reasoning or deduction.²¹

Reid is here addressing Hume's challenge as applied to the case of the first principles of morals ('of morals' are the words I have omitted). But it is obvious enough that what he says about these involves pointing to their status *as first principles*, and what is entailed thereby. In other words, there is every reason to think that what Reid says here about the first principles of morals – their axiomatic character; their not being deductions, or the product of reasoning – he regards as features of first principles in general. And indeed elsewhere he does speak of first principles in general as 'axioms' (e.g., *Inq* V viii, p. 130a, *IP* I ii, p. 230b).

So, for Reid, whatever the status of the attempt to derive an 'ought' from an 'is', a defence of the first principles could not take the form of such a (putative) derivation, if for no other reason than that first principles, *qua* first principles, cannot be derived from anything. Hence it cannot be the whole story to say that Reid's defence of the first principles (or certain portions thereof) can be reconstructed along the lines DeRose describes. Such arguments may serve, as it were, to display the normative character of our basic beliefs; but they cannot be the *source* of the authority these principles enjoy. (Reid, of course, did not think that the authority of the first principles hung on *any* argument that he or anyone else might give.) As I have emphasized, the first principles, Reid tells us, 'may admit of illustration, yet being self-evident, do not admit of proof' (*IP* I ii, p. 231a); they 'require not proof, but to be placed in a proper point of view' (p. 231b).

What then is 'the proper point of view' from which to regard the first principles? And what exactly is supposed to be the source of their authority, of their being things which we not only do abide by but ought to abide by, if

²⁰ John Searle, notably, in his *Speech Acts* (Cambridge UP, 1969), argues that a set of descriptive statements can entail an evaluative conclusion – that one can (in certain cases) derive an 'ought' from an 'is' (pp. 175ff.). Searle (p. 132) calls the denial that this is possible 'the naturalistic fallacy fallacy'.

²¹ *Essay on the Active Powers*, V vii, p. 675b.

this source is not and cannot be any sort of argument? That the principles are apt descriptions of our credal lives is something nobody denies; but whence derives the prescriptive character which Reid so clearly takes these principles to have?

Reid does have an answer to these questions; and it is actually, as I see it, rather straightforward. Before presenting that answer, however, I shall suggest what I think is behind whatever difficulty we are having in making sense of Reid's position on this matter. The difficulty, I suggest, is due to our assuming that any account of what makes these principles not just descriptive but *prescriptive* – things we not only do but ought to believe – must be in terms of something other than the principles themselves. In so far as we ought to believe these things, we are tempted to think that this is because there exists some further consideration(s) or argument(s) for their justifiedness; and what we want is for those considerations to be made explicit, those arguments to be clearly stated. It seems to me, however, that Reid's whole point is that the first principles of common sense are their own source of authority. So how could that be the case?

Here, I think, we need first to take seriously Reid's calling the principles '*axioms*' (as in the quotation from *Active Powers* V vii above), axioms being (my edition of *Webster's* tells me) fundamental or universal principles or rules. Next, we must follow Searle (*Speech Acts*, pp. 33–4) in distinguishing between what he calls 'regulative' and 'constitutive' rules:

... we might say that regulative rules regulate antecedently or independently existing forms of behaviour; for example, many rules of etiquette regulate inter-personal relationships that exist independently of rules. But constitutive rules do not merely regulate, they create or define new forms of behaviour. The rules of football or chess, for example, do not merely regulate playing football or chess, but as it were they create the very possibility of playing such games. The activities of playing football or chess are constituted by acting in accordance with (at least a large subset of) the appropriate rules.

My suggestion is that Reid regards the first principles of common sense as constitutive principles – they are constitutive (for us, given our nature) of cognizing at all. If nothing else, though there are other things, it is Reid's recognition of the contingency of the first principles, and of the fact that our constitution (and so our view of what is essential to cognition as such) might have been very different from what it is, that separates him from Kant.²²

And because (for us, given our constitution) the first principles create the very possibility of cognizing at all, there is a real sense in which (given our nature) we literally cannot imagine creatures for whom those principles are

²² Cf. Wolterstorff, p. 231.

nothing – creatures who do not take their truth-orientated faculties to be reliable on the whole; who do not see life and intelligence in each other; who do not think that the things which they clearly and distinctly perceive really exist; and so on. It is, of course, easy to *speak* of such creatures – I have just done so. But it is significant that when actually confronted by (human) beings who seem to approximate to this, to the extent that they do resemble such creatures, we find ourselves unable to share, even imaginatively, their ‘perspective’ of the world. How, we wonder, could they even get around in the world if they did not trust their senses (etc.)? Hence our tendency to say, with Reid, that one who professes not to believe the first principles, but who acts as though he does believe them, ‘either acts the hypocrite, or imposes upon himself’ (*Inq* VI xx, p. 184a). In terms of Searle’s distinction, the sceptic’s mistake consists in wanting us to regard the first principles as merely regulative – as though it were perfectly clear to us that the whole business of cognition could exist independently of such things as taking one’s faculties not to be fallacious.

Of course the constitutive rules of football and chess are both ‘local’ and ‘optional’ – the activities they help to define are just a couple of activities among many possible others; and it is up to you whether you engage in either. Even so, it is in the nature of constitutive rules that in so far as one is engaged in the relevant sort of activity, one not only will but ought to act in accordance with them. For instance, it is (so to speak) a ‘logical’ point that in so far as one is playing chess, one must not try to move one’s rook on the diagonal – conversely, that one ought to move one’s rook only vertically or horizontally. (Past a certain point, a failure to abide by the constitutive rules of an activity in which one is engaged means not just – or not even – that censure is due, but that one is no longer ‘playing the game’ at all. Hence in the case of concern to us here, gross failure to accept the first principles of common sense is, as Reid is constantly reminding us, just plain lunacy.) Thus constitutive rules have both a descriptive and a prescriptive aspect: they describe the behaviour (at least within certain limits) of one engaged in the activity in question; but for one who is so engaged, these rules also prescribe (and prohibit) certain ways of acting.

In the case of the first principles of common sense, of course, the relevant activity, namely, cognizing, is both global and mandatory: it is an activity one cannot help engaging in (what, after all, is the alternative?); and it is an activity that one engages in whenever one is engaged in any (other) activity at all. Some might object that prescriptions are apt only when the activity in question is voluntary.²³ It seems to me, however, that this objection rests on

²³ This appears, e.g., to be Dretske’s view; see his ‘Norms, History, and the Constitution of the Mental’, in *Perception, Knowledge and Belief* (Cambridge UP, 2000), pp. 242–58, esp. p. 251.

an undefended conception of norms – one that Reid would have rejected as too narrow. As he, following Aristotle, might put it: if one is a carpenter, there are certain rules which one ought to follow *qua* carpenter, whether or not one is a carpenter voluntarily, and whether or not one can avoid performing the activity in the prescribed manner: it is the nature of the activity itself, and not the fact that one freely engages in it, which makes the performance of certain actions right or wrong (cf., e.g., *Nicomachean Ethics* I vii). In this way too, the suggestion would be that (*pace* Plantinga) norms can be given by nature itself – by the nature of the activity, thing or creature at issue. Hence the first principles are, for us, and in our view, the ‘fixed point’ upon which the business of cognizing rests (cf. *IP* VI iv, p. 435a). And precisely because they play this constitutive role, so long as we are engaged in the activity of cognizing, we not only must but *ought to* abide by them. As I see it, Reid’s anti-sceptical arguments, like the discussion of the previous section, are best viewed not as attempts to *establish* either the truth of the first principles or the rationality of belief therein, but as attempts to place the first principles ‘in a proper point of view’ (*IP* I ii, p. 231b; my italics): in so far as the arguments are effective, that is because they are successful ‘illustrations’ (p. 231a) of the constitutive role those principles play in our cognitive lives.

I think we can now see how Reid would want to answer Plantinga’s challenge, as described earlier. Plantinga assumes that in defending the rationality of our belief in the reliability of our natural faculties, thorough-going naturalists will have to put their money on Darwinian theory and argue (in effect) that this belief is rational because, after all, we would not be here wondering whether our faculties were reliable unless they were! But that is not Reid’s strategy. Whatever the probability that natural selection would give organisms a preponderance of true beliefs, Reid would say, arguments on either side are beside the point, because any such argument would presuppose that our faculties are reliable (cf. *IP* VI v, p. 447b; also Lehrer and Warner, esp. pp. 367ff.). Which points us back towards what Reid regards as the right place to look for the justification of our basic beliefs: in the axiomatic, foundational or constitutive role they enjoy in all of our reasoning, thought and action.

But even though Reid himself no more appeals to natural selection than to the providence of God in defending the first principles, has Plantinga not shown that Reid’s naturalism and the attendant belief in the reliability of our natural faculties, *if combined with* Darwinian theory, leads to irrationality? That is contentious, at best. Plantinga himself allows that his arguments might provide good grounds only for ‘simple agnosticism’ on the question of the probability that our faculties are reliable, given natural selection (and metaphysical naturalism) (*WPF*, p. 229). But an attitude of agnosticism

vis à vis the first principles would follow from that only if this probability were the sole determinant of the reasonability of that belief. (As though the first principles constituted a theory, and we were deciding what sort of credal attitude to adopt towards it.) And of course Reid would insist that it is not.

None of this is to say that Reid – or I, for that matter – would endorse ‘Darwinian optimism’ of the sort voiced by the likes of, e.g., Fodor and Dennett (cf. fn. 9 above). A defence of the first principles does not commit one to thinking that humans *come anywhere close* to approximating to ‘the system of thought prescribed by the very best systems of deductive and inductive logic and decision theory’.²⁴ In effect, there is a confusion in Fodor and Dennett between reliability of the sort Reid claims for our natural faculties, on the one hand, and rationality (in the sense just indicated), on the other. (In my view, this confusion permeates much of the literature on ‘evolutionary epistemology’.) The first principles speak to the reliability of some pretty homely beliefs – those issuing from the ‘natural’ faculties (e.g., that the table which I distinctly perceive does exist, that I had such and such for breakfast this morning); no mention is made of ‘rationality’ of the sort just described (a good portion of which is arguably not natural at all, but learnt, or otherwise acquired).

Moreover, Reid’s point is that we must trust the natural *faculties* – not, in the end, every deliverance thereof: with regard to such homely beliefs as those just mentioned, even at its strongest, the claim (in effect) is that we are *prima facie* (not *ultima facie*) warranted in accepting them as true. Thus, e.g., that ‘there is a certain regard to human testimony in matters of fact’ (*IP* VI v, p. 450b), another first principle, does not mean that mature humans should not *often* withhold belief in particular cases of testimony. (Though Reid would also point out that defeaters of such beliefs, where they exist, will themselves presume the reliability of our natural faculties.)

Finally, even if certain false beliefs (e.g., an inflated self-conception) and unreliable or ‘illogical’ belief-forming ‘heuristics’ (e.g., biased sampling techniques in inductive reasoning) are, for us, ‘instinctive’ or ‘automatic’, that in itself does not commit Reid to regarding them as reliable or rational. To qualify as a first principle a belief, or a belief-forming mechanism, must be such that it cannot be explained away as the product of one or another ‘prejudice’ (*IP* I ii, p. 231a), such as, say, its utility in furthering certain social ends; or its being a way of coping with uncertain situations, or with other contingent local circumstances. To take a central example, however, our

²⁴ M. Matthen, ‘Human Rationality and the Unique Origin Constraint’, in R. Cummins, A. Ariew and M. Perlman (eds), *Functions: New Readings in the Philosophy of Psychology and Biology* (Oxford UP, forthcoming), pp. 341–72, at p. 364.

belief in the non-fallaciousness of our natural faculties cannot be explained away in this manner, if for no other reason than that the attempt to do so would require our taking that belief *not* to be subject to such treatment. So not everything that is 'natural' counts as a first principle for Reid; and whereas it is, typically, the unreliability of just such beliefs and heuristics as *can* be explained away in the manner just described which leads people to pessimistic views about human cognitive functioning, I have been suggesting here only that with regard to the first principles, Reid holds to what we might call 'the normativity of the natural'.²⁵

All of which is to say that Reid is committed to a lot less optimism about human cognition than is evinced by the likes of Fodor and Dennett. And again, this is probably just as well; Darwinian or 'Panglossian' optimism (as Stich calls it) does not fit well with a lot of empirical findings – including everyday observations of our not so occasional irrationality. In all likelihood, it stems from an implausible adaptationist picture (cf. Matthen). But so far as I can see, there is – unsurprisingly! – nothing in Reid that commits him to that.²⁶

V. NORMS AND FACTS: THE CURRENT DEBATE OVER EPISTEMIC NATURALISM

As Goldman, Maffie and Haack, for example, have documented, there are a great variety of positions that have been or might be termed forms of 'naturalism' in epistemology.²⁷ And I shall not even try here to present a comprehensive survey of the relevant literature, much less attempt to render it a coherent whole. Rather, in closing, I shall focus on one prominent thread running through it – the one which seems to me to sit least well with Reid's epistemological views. As I read him, Reid rejects an assumption shared by the majority of (epistemic) naturalists and non-naturalists or anti-naturalists alike.

²⁵ This phrase is Todd's: 'Plantinga and the Naturalized Epistemology of Thomas Reid', *Dialogue*, 35 (1996), pp. 93–107, at p. 99.

²⁶ Plantinga's challenge might be posed in another form, of course, *viz* that the naturalist must produce a viable account of proper functioning (cf. *WPF*, pp. 199–215). To which Reid's reply would be that *qua* cognitive-epistemic subject, a properly functioning human is, at minimum, one operating in accordance with the constitutive first principles of common sense. On this last point, cf. E. Sosa and J. Van Cleve, 'Thomas Reid', in S. Emmanuel (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 179–200, at pp. 198–9.

²⁷ See A. Goldman, 'Naturalistic Epistemology and Reliabilism', in P.A. French *et al.* (eds), *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. xix: *Philosophical Naturalism* (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1994), pp. 301–20; J. Maffie, 'Recent Work on Naturalized Epistemology'; S. Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), ch. 6.

Previously, I noted that the naturalism/non-naturalism debate has to do with whether epistemology is continuous with the rest of science. And I believe that this question, in turn, is understood by most as having to do with whether and how the results of science – that is, purely descriptive findings concerning how we reason, about the causes of belief, about our predispositions to form beliefs in various ways, etc. – can bear upon the normative epistemological enterprise of evaluating our reasonings, beliefs and so forth, and the articulation of evaluative notions such as justification (‘warrant’) and knowledge. Thus the current debate over ‘naturalized epistemology’ centrally involves a debate over the relation, if any, between the descriptive and the evaluative (normative), between facts and values, in the epistemic domain. This is clear enough, I think, in some of the things that have been said in connection with the subject:

... a mix of philosophy and psychology is needed to produce acceptable principles of justifiedness (Goldman).

... any epistemologist who rejects scepticism ought to be influenced in his ... philosophical work by descriptive work in psychology (Kornblith).

... the results from the sciences of cognition may be relevant to, and may be legitimately used in the resolution of, traditional epistemological problems (Haack).

... it is hard to come up with convincing normative principles except by considering how people actually do reason, which is the province of descriptive theory (Harman).²⁸

As it happens, each of the parties just quoted is more or less friendly to naturalizing epistemology. But that the issue has to do with negotiating the relation between prescriptions and descriptions, between the normative and the natural, is a belief that is just as evident in what opponents of naturalized epistemology have said. Just one example is provided by Lehrer’s dismissal of Goldman’s ‘naturalistic’ account of justification:

... the reliabilist [is] in error when he claims that it is what originates a belief that converts it into a justified belief and knowledge. This is, in effect, to confuse the *reason* a person has for believing something with the *cause* of his believing it.²⁹

More generally, Hilary Kornblith has described the typical reaction among epistemologists to Quine’s original suggestion³⁰ that, once naturalized, ‘Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science’:

²⁸ These quotations are taken from R. Feldman, ‘Methodological Naturalism in Epistemology’, in J. Greco and E. Sosa (eds), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 170–86, at pp. 170–1.

²⁹ K. Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (Boulder: Westview, 1990), pp. 168–9.

³⁰ W.V.O. Quine, ‘Epistemology Naturalized’, in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (Columbia UP, 1969), pp. 69–90, at p. 82.

For many, [Quine's approach] seem[s] to involve rejecting the normative dimension in epistemological theorizing, and, in so doing, abdicating at least one central role which epistemology has generally played.... If epistemology is to become no more than a chapter of psychology, then on one straightforward account of what psychology is all about, the resulting discipline will become merely descriptive, and thereby lose all normative force.³¹

VI. REID'S RELATION TO THE CURRENT DEBATE

Even among those who are friendly to 'naturalizing epistemology' in one or another way, for instance, the theorists cited just previously, there are few who would follow Quine in recommending the *replacement* of epistemology by psychology: their view is that descriptive findings ought to inform epistemology considered as a normative enterprise. Why? Because, e.g., they seek a 'psychologically realistic' epistemology to which we can at least approximate, or because they are interested in the 'meliorative' project of helping us to improve ourselves, epistemically speaking.³² So in the naturalism/non-naturalism debate, in arguing whether epistemology is continuous with science, the issue really is how far (if at all) the descriptive can or should inform the prescriptive; however, just about everybody is agreed that there is a reasonably clear-cut fact/value distinction to be drawn in the epistemic domain.

As Keith Lehrer has observed in his discussion of attempts to locate Reid with respect to another currently popular way of dividing up epistemologies (namely, as foundationalist or coherentist), 'Contemporary taxonomy recapitulates contemporary prejudices'.³³ And, as I have presented him above, this is precisely what Reid would say of the contemporary dispute between epistemic naturalists and non-naturalists – that the widely shared assumption of a reasonably clear-cut fact/value distinction with regard to all epistemic matters is a mere prejudice. At any rate, it is an assumption which Reid denies in the case of the first principles: as I have portrayed him, it is not that Reid thinks that we can derive an 'ought' from an 'is'; rather he holds that common sense is itself a normative notion, and that first

³¹ Kornblith, 'Epistemic Normativity', *Synthese*, 94 (1993), pp. 357–76, at p. 357.

³² Cf., e.g., Harman's arguments against certain forms of foundationalism and coherentism, and Goldman: 'Only cognitive science can tell us which [cognitive] processes belong to the human repertoire; and cognitive science is needed to help ascertain which processes in this repertoire possess the epistemically relevant properties': 'Précis and Update of *Epistemology and Cognition*', in K. Lehrer and M. Clay (eds), *Knowledge and Scepticism* (Boulder: Westview, 1989), pp. 69–87, at p. 73.

³³ Lehrer, 'Chisholm, Reid, and the Problem of the Epistemic Surd', *Philosophical Studies*, 60 (1990), pp. 39–45, at p. 43.

principles of common sense have a 'mixed' character, in the sense that they are simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive. The first principles are constitutive principles: they are beliefs that do and ought to guide the rest of our belief-forming and belief-revising practices; for, given our constitution, they really are, at least for us, the axioms or laws underlying any activity of forming and revising beliefs at all.³⁴ Or so I read Reid.³⁵

Of course there is more to epistemology than first principles. And even if the first principles have the sort of 'mixed' character I think Reid takes them to have, that hardly implies that he rejects the fact/value distinction wholesale, or that he thinks that the whole of epistemology will be like this. So I am not sure where this leaves Reid *vis à vis* 'naturalizing epistemology'. That he holds to something like 'the normativity of the natural' with regard to the first principles might seem a pretty radical form of naturalism. Then again, it is not quite right to say that Reid thinks (with Quine) that epistemology is to be *replaced* by psychology (either wholesale or with respect to the first principles), or that (in the case of the latter) we can reduce the normative to the natural. For either of these ways of putting things suggests that there is a real gap there to be bridged – which, as I read him, is precisely what Reid denies.

I do not myself think that the question 'Is Reid's epistemology naturalistic or not?' is in itself all that interesting. The question strikes me as largely terminological: what is the 'right' answer to it will depend upon what we mean by 'naturalism'. To my mind, the two interesting questions we are left with are (a) is the interpretation of Reid's epistemology I have been developing and defending here (as against a providentialist interpretation, say) correct? And if so, (b) is the resulting view plausible? I hope that if I have done nothing else, I have managed to make it seem that neither of these questions should obviously be answered in the negative.³⁶

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³⁴ Cf. Todd's introduction to his edition of *The Philosophical Orations of Thomas Reid* (Southern Illinois UP, 1989), pp. 1–28, at pp. 10–11.

³⁵ As also do Todd, and William Alston, 'A "Doxastic Practice" Approach to Epistemology', in Lehrer and Clay (eds), *Knowledge and Scepticism*, pp. 1–29. Sosa and Van Cleve (pp. 198–9) come close to endorsing such a reading as well.

³⁶ This paper began during an NEH Summer Seminar, *Thomas Reid on Perception, Knowledge, and Action*, directed by James Van Cleve (July–August, 2000), in which I was very fortunate to take part. Other ancestors of the paper were presented at the APA Pacific Division Meeting and the University of British Columbia Philosophy Department. Thanks to all those whose comments forced improvements, and special thanks to Jonathan Cohen, Cindy Holder, Jack Lyons, D.D. Todd and James Van Cleve.