Pragmatism and Reid's 'Third Way'
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1. Introduction

However improbable the connection strikes some, there is a line from Thomas Reid, the 18th Century member of the 'Scottish School of Common Sense', to the American (or 'classical') Pragmatists, notable members of which included C.S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. But, as has been documented (Lehrer 1976, Redekop 2004), Reid and 'the philosophy of common sense' did have a real and lasting influence on early American philosophy, politics, education and culture. Further, those pragmatists – both classical and contemporary – who mention Reid tend to say only positive things about him and his views. For example, there is Peirce's well-known reference to Reid as "that subtle but well-balanced intellect" (Buchler, p. 293); and more recently, there are approving citations from both Richard Rorty, a self-described pragmatist, and Hilary Putnam, who is as vocal and prolific a promoter of the virtues of pragmatism (as he conceives of it) as any current philosopher.

The question to be addressed here is this: In addition to the historical connection, and beyond these kind words, what substantive philosophical connection, if any, is there between Reid's views and those of the pragmatist tradition, both classical and contemporary? Answering this question, of course, is made more difficult by the fact that different things might be meant by 'pragmatism' – not to mention, by the fact that the various well-known proponents of pragmatism have held some subtle views, and on a whole broad range of topics, with plenty of significant internecine disputes besides.

It goes some way towards simplifying matters, however, that those who have addressed the question of the relation between Reid and pragmatism have tended to focus – as I will do here – on Reid's epistemological views and, in particular, on his defense of common sense and 'the first principles (of common sense)' against sceptical attack. And, according to such recent writers – chiefly, Peter Baumann (1999, 2004), P.D. Magnus (2004), and Erik Lundestad (2006, 2008) – there *is* a real, substantive philosophical connection: in responding to the sceptic, they say, Reid either did employ some

distinctively pragmatist maneuver, or he should have, though he failed to properly develop the necessary 'proto-pragmatic' elements within his epistemology.

Here, I want to examine such suggestions. And they *do* merit attention: like Reid's works, pragmatism has suffered from a relative historical neglect; but, just as there has been a resurgence of interest in Reid, recent times have seen a 'revival of pragmatism' (Dickstein ed., 1998) and the expressed hope for a 'pragmatist enlightenment' (Putnam 2004). Because of this, and not just because of the aforementioned historical connection, the relation between Reid's views and pragmatism deserves careful consideration. Moreover, and looking ahead, I believe that there is a real, substantive connection between Reid's views and pragmatism. At the same time, however, I want to suggest that Reid's affinity with pragmatism is both shallower and deeper than others have suggested. Specifically, there is an emphasis on 'the primacy of practice' in Reid's philosophy, and his epistemology in particular. This emphasis, like certain other features of his views, constitutes a significant pragmatist element in Reid. However, this is not something that occurs alongside, or as a supplement or welcome alternative to his epistemological defense of common sense (etc.). That is, an emphasis on the primacy of practice is not opposed to or even distinct from Reid's attempt to show that the first principles are epistemically justified. (In this way, the pragmatist commitment is shallower than has been suggested by some.) Rather, the emphasis on practice comprises a *central part* of that attempt – it is key to Reid's avoidance of both scepticism and an unabashed dogmatism, to his 'third way'. (In this way, the pragmatist element is deeper.) In trying to establish these claims, it will be best to begin with a brief review of what others have recently said about Reid and pragmatism.

2. Some recent discussions reviewed (Baumann, Magnus, Lundestad)

Peter Baumann argues that "Reid's theory of common sense implicitly contains a dilemma" (1999, p. 47). Speaking of the epistemic status of the first principles, Reid

argues that they "need no proof, and …do not admit of direct proof" (*EIP* 1.2, 230a/39[1]). This follows directly from their (supposed) foundational role: since the first principles are *first* principles, they can't be argued for on the basis of something more fundamental; and because this is so, it makes no sense to *ask* that such a justification be given. But even if this is right – even if we neither can nor should attempt to provide 'proof' for the first principles – nothing follows about whether those principles are *correct*: "Proving that something is a principle does not imply proving that it is true." (1999, p. 50)

Reid also, of course, stresses the fact that our belief in the first principles is not up to us: we are so constituted that "we are under a necessity of assenting to them" (*IHM* 5.7, 130a/71). Again, though, even if this is correct, it does not help address scepticism – Hume, after all, acknowledged the inevitability of certain 'common sense' beliefs.

So, Baumann writes, neither of Reid's arguments goes any way towards *justifying* the first principles. And now we face a dilemma:

> *first horn*: we can continue to make truth and knowledge claims about the first principles of common sense, while acknowledging that we have no good arguments (no justification) for doing so – this is *dogmatism*

> *second horn*: we can refrain from making any such claims, and so not incur any justificatory burden; here, we content ourselves with believing these things, perhaps inevitably, but without any pretense to our being justified in doing so – this is *scepticism* (1999, p. 51)

But of course Reid himself wanted to avoid an unabashed dogmatism: after all, he grants our fallibility and the possibility that even our most deeply held beliefs *could* turn

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[1] References to Reid will be followed by the relevant Chapter/Essay and Section numbers in Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind* ('*IHM*') and/or his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* ('*EIP*'), as well as the page numbers in both the Hamilton and the Brookes editions of the relevant works. (The Hamilton citation includes an 'a' or 'b': 'a' refers to the right-hand column, 'b' to the left-hand side.) So, the above citation "*EIP* 1.2, 230a/39" refers to Essay 1, Chapter 2 of the *Intellectual Powers*, p. 230a in Hamilton, p. 39 in Brookes.

out to be false;[2] and, while our acceptance of the first principles is unreasoned – not *derived* from some deeper principles or premises – Reid hardly regards the epistemic conduct of mature cognizers as properly acritical, or that their beliefs are without justification. And, as this last point suggests, neither does Reid regard scepticism as a live option – the unacceptability of the Humean predicament is, he tells us, what inspired him to examine critically the received philosophy (*IHM*, Dedication, 95a-b/3-4). So, Baumann says, "[t]here *must* be a third way for him" (1999, p. 52):

> This third way, of which there are "hints" in Reid, is "the pragmatist way out":
> Even if we cannot give justifying reasons for our principles of knowledge, we can
> give a totally different kind of justification: a pragmatic justification. The
> principles of common sense enable us to build theories which guide our actions
> and let us attain our goals. Insofar as they fulfill this function, they are justified
> and there is no place for a different kind of justification, no need to talk about
> truth or knowledge. (1999, p. 53)

Of course, while Reid repeatedly cites the usefulness of our faculties, he doesn't take this last step himself – in no small part, because he regards their utility as bound up with their reliability.[3] If Baumann is correct, though, something *like* 'the pragmatist way out' is required, in view of our inability to provide a non-pragmatic, *epistemic* justification for the first principles.

Now, one might worry whether the appeal to pragmatic justification itself helps in addressing the problem that Baumann identifies. After all, if we are taking the threat of scepticism seriously, *who is to say* whether the first principles "enable us to build theories

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[2] 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" (*IHM* 6.7, 130b/72); "we must [trust the testimony of our faculties] implicitly, until God gives us new faculties to sit in judgment upon the old" (*EIP* 6.5, 447b/481; cf. *EIP* 7.4, 488b/570 & 486a/565).

[3] So too, Baumann does not himself want to endorse pragmatism: "I do not intend to discuss or even defend the view here that pragmatism puts a legitimate end to all sceptical worries. I have strong doubts about that. But I do want to stress that one can find hints towards a quite sophisticated pragmatist answer to the dilemma of dogmatism and scepticism in Reid." (2004, p. 75).

which guide our actions and let us attain our goals"? And who is to say that *false* principles could not do the latter anyway? These are empirical questions, which are as open to sceptical questioning as any other. So the dilemma still looms.

Baumann agrees, and responds to this concern by clarifying his view: What we face is a Pascal's-wager-type case (2004, p. 74). He writes:

> 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: The outcomes of common sense are always at least as good as those of scepticism and they are better under at least one circumstance (the external world exists). The solution to our problem is clear: We should go for common sense and the belief in the existence of the external world. This is a pragmatic and not an epistemic justification of a principle of common sense. It leaves the epistemic status of such principles (as to truth, justification, etc.) open; the outcomes are defined in practical rather than epistemic terms. However, it still gives us a reason in favour of common sense, namely a practical one. (2004, p. 75)

So, Baumann says, "The pragmatic argument…does not involve any…claims about the factual usefulness of common sense. All we need are conditional judgments and these are not controversial between sceptics and non-sceptics." (2004, p. 75).

Fair enough: the argument does not presume that common sense *is in fact* useful. Its *conditional* utility, however, is taken for granted – by, Baumann says, both sceptics and non-sceptics alike. But should it be? Perhaps the conditional utility of common sense is something that the relevant parties are prepared to grant only because they (and we) are all so steeped in the belief that the external world *does* exist, and that common sense *serves us well* in it.

In any case, there are still other worries about the pragmatic argument, as restated just above. As already noted, Reid is constantly emphasizing the fact that *it is not up to us*

whether to believe the first principle. One might worry, however, that the decision-theoretic argument – "We should go for common sense and the belief in the existence of the external world" (2004, p. 75) – belies this fact. More seriously, Reid emphasizes the fact that the first principles are all epistemically on a par with one another. But the propounding of the decision-theoretic argument for trusting our perceptual faculties, even if it aims only at pragmatic justification, takes the reliability of reasoning (specifically, decision-theoretic reasoning) for granted:

> 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? (*IHM* 6.20, 183b/169).

What all of this suggests is that if we want our 'way out' of the dilemma we are facing to reflect as far as possible Reid's own views, we will need to look elsewhere. And if this 'third way' incorporates a pragmatic element, it must take some other form.

Here, P. D. Magnus has a suggestion. Recall Reid's description of what would happen if we *could* and *did* 'throw off [the] belief of external objects':

> I resolve not to believe my senses. I break my nose against a post that comes in my way; I step into a dirty kennel; and, after twenty such wise rational actions, I am taken up and clapped in a madhouse. (*IHM* 6.20, 184a/170)

This may sound like a build-up to a pragmatic justification of the sort Baumann describes. But, Magnus says, Reid's argument here is more subtle than that: his point is that "the so-called sceptic betrays a belief in the real world by managing their affairs just as common folk do" (2004, p. 71). Reid says: "If a man pretends to be a sceptic with regard to the informations of sense, and yet prudently keeps out of harm's way as other men do, he must excuse my suspicion, that he either acts the hypocrite, or imposes upon himself" (*IHM* 6.20, 184a/170). Magnus continues:

> If sceptics see that their practice implies certain beliefs, then they are left with a choice of abstaining from their practice or accepting the beliefs. Reid's argument cannot force their choice, but it makes them pay a higher price if they cleave to scepticism. We might call this an *argument from practical commitment*. If

sceptics navigate the world in the way you or I do, they already do believe in an external world. (2004, p. 71; 2008, pp. 6-7)

So the 'pragmatic maneuver' Reid employs is both more subtle *and less ambitious* than the one Baumann describes: the argument does not really concern the justificatory status – epistemic or practical – of the relevant belief (or first principle) at all. But the pragmatic maneuver is also *less significant*. For, as Magnus points out, the appeal to practical consequences (as in, e.g., the nose/kennel passage quoted above) – the "imprudence", as Reid put it, of casting aside belief in one's senses – occurs in the *Inquiry* alongside two other 'replies' to the sceptic. And Magnus himself identifies still other Reidian replies to the sceptic (see 2008, Sections 2 and 4). Of course, these other replies might fail, or might somehow be bound up with the appeal to practical consequences. On the face of it, however, the more subtle pragmatist maneuver Magnus describes it isn't *obviously* central or essential to Reid's defense of the first principles. In short, it is not clear whether 'the pragmatist element' has all that much work to do.

What is more, it is not clear whether the argument from practical commitment that Magnus describes *is* any more effective against the sceptic than Baumann's less 'subtle' attempt at a pragmatic justification. For as noted above, and as Baumann points out (2004, p. 76), "Reid's arch-sceptic Hume" is happy to agree that no one can "live scepticism in everyday life." And, of course, this Humean admission hardly mollifies Reid. Thus, a bare featuring of the practical commitment to common sense that Magnus describes is regarded by both parties to the debate as an inadequate response to scepticism.

So we have yet to find a way out of the dilemma, a 'third way' that doesn't reduce to either scepticism or dogmatism. *And* we have yet to find a pragmatist element in Reid that both fits, as an interpretive matter, with the things Reid himself says, and is effective, as an epistemological matter, as some sort of counter to scepticism. It is not surprising, then, that others who have addressed the topic of Reid's relation to pragmatism have felt that pragmatism, and responding to the sceptic, requires a real *break* from Reidian common sense philosophy. This is the view of Eric Lundestad (2006, 2008).

According to Lundestad, both a genuine pragmatism and the avoidance of dilemmas of the sort Baumann describes are not possible from within a Reidian

framework. Not that Reid's philosophy does not contain 'proto-pragmatic' elements – particularly ones present in Peirce's 'critical common-sensism'. Thus, in Reid, we find a distinction between real versus merely professed doubt (2006, p. 131; 2008, p. 177), an insistence that the lack of a positive justification for certain beliefs does not itself imply doubt (2006, p. 130), and the observation that inquiry in *any* form arises and is carried out against the background of certain theories, beliefs and methods – certain *practices* (2006, p. 131).

Reid's *mistake*, according to Lundestad, and where Reid and full-blooded pragmatists part company, is the attempt to find some infallible and/or unrevisable beliefs that are isolated from criticism. Lundestad writes (echoing Baumann), that Reid is "fully prepared to accept that our belief in the senses [e.g.] is not justified" (2008, p. 176). But because common sense philosophy nonetheless recommends confident belief about such things as the reliability of perception (e.g.), it "explicitly encourages dogmatism" (2006, p. 128), and so is locked in a 'stalemate' with the sceptic:

> [S]cepticism challenges us to come up with *reasons* for our beliefs. Or, as we may also put it, not to accept anything as true that we do not have reasons to believe. When Reid claims that commonsensical beliefs may be taken as true because they are inherent to our nature, this challenge is simply ignored. (2006, p. 132)

Whereas, Lundestad writes, John Dewey for example sees common sense as consisting of certain "established or conventional ways of dealing with reality" (2006, p. 135), and *these* are all revisable. "This openness for change is the most striking way in which pragmatism differs from the philosophy *of c*ommon sense….Even our most firmly held beliefs may…come to be revised" (2006, p. 135). (Peirce, in his "Critical Common-Sensism" [Buchler, pp. 293ff.], and James, in his "Pragmatism and Common Sense" (1907), seriously entertain some version of these claims; see too Baumann [1999, p. 53].)

This approach helps us avoid the charge that any appeal to common sense is just a lazy falling-back upon received dogma – the charge, in Kantian terms, that we are failing to observe the distinction between "the *quaestio facti* and the *quaestio juris*" (2008, p. 179). However, this distinction becomes one that is drawn *within* experience: some

practices 'work', others do not; the former receive 'corroboration'. When a practice proves problematic, *then* we may explicitly form a belief about it, and "the validity of this belief can only be settled by way of justification" in terms of its practical efficacy. This approach may not be without its problems, Lundestad says, but "there is no other way of overcoming the stalemate of common sense than by continuing to develop it" (2008, p. 186)

Now, as advertised, this statement of the pragmatic approach involves going beyond Reid – and not just because it involves elements one will not find in Reid. In many ways, it is distinctly *un*Reidian. For one thing, it makes common sense and/or the beliefs to which it gives rise quite plastic. (One can hardly imagine *Reid* saying that "common sense is continuously changing" [Lundestad 2006, p. 135].) More fundamentally, it is just not clear that Reid *does* think that certain common sense beliefs, including the first principles, "are not justified". Of course, since the first principles are *first* principles, we cannot justify them in terms of some other beliefs or principles. But it does not follow that those principles are not justified – not unless we assume that foundationalism and the attendant notion of *im*mediate justification are non-starters. Still, we have yet to see in what the justification of first principles is supposed to consist, such that we can avoid being mere 'dogmatists', while at the same time answering the sceptic. But I do think Reid has a story to tell here – and one, moreover, that incorporates some pragmatist ideas as a central part. What I want to do in the rest of this paper is to describe the Reidian story, his 'third way', leaving the reader to decide how much merit there is in the resulting view.

3. Some elements of pragmatism

As we have seen, those who regard pragmatism as playing a role in Reid's philosophy (Baumann and Magnus) focus almost exclusively on the question of the 'practical' matter of one's acting in a particular way – whether this has (or would have) instrumental value, whether it is required by the consistent sceptic, and so on. But, as I have been indicating, not only do the views we have considered not provide satisfying answers to the dilemma we face, they fail to capture the pragmatist element in Reid. To see this, however, we

need a broader picture of what pragmatism has traditionally involved. Here, Hilary Putnam provides a useful reference point; for he is a proponent of a fairly broadly characterized version of pragmatism. Putnam writes:

> What I find attractive in pragmatism is not a systematic theory in the usual sense at all. It is rather a certain group of theses…. Cursorily summarized, those theses are (1) *antiscepticism*: pragmatists hold that doubt requires justification just as much as belief…; (2) *fallibilism*: pragmatists hold that there is never a metaphysical guarantee to be had that such-and-such a belief will never need revision (that one can be both fallibilistic *and* antisceptical is perhaps *the* unique insight of American pragmatism); (3) the thesis that there is no *fundamental* dichotomy between "facts" and "values"; and (4) the thesis that, in a certain sense, practice is primary[4] in philosophy. (1994a, p. 152)

There are various other candidates for inclusion here, of course – e.g., a suspiciousness about representationalist accounts of the mind, or an anti-essentialism about familiar objects of philosophical theorizing ('knowledge', 'truth', etc.).[5]

Further, each of the items Putnam lists could be elaborated upon, and developed in specific ways. For instance, (regarding 2) the endorsement of fallibilism is often associated in the relevant literature with the rejection of *foundationalist* epistemology. More specifically, it is associated with "the whole project of finding *indubitable* 'foundations of knowledge'" (Putnam 2001, p. 22; R.A. Putnam 2002, pp. 8ff.) – the attempt, in Rorty's terms, to evade "the contingency of starting points" (1980a, p. 726), to "ground some element of our practices on something external to these practices" (1980a, p. 728). (These matters, in turn, are central to understanding pragmatism, in Rorty's view.) Similarly, (re. 3) it is not merely a neat cleavage between *facts and values*

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[4] Cf. Brandom: "Pragmatism can be thought of narrowly: as a philosophical school of thought centered on evaluating beliefs by their tendency to promote success at the satisfaction of wants, whose paradigmatic practitioners were the classical American triumvirate of Charles Peirce, William James and John Dewey. But pragmatism can also be thought of more broadly: as a movement centered on the primacy of the practical" (2002, p. 40).

[5] See Rorty 1980a and Hookway 2010 for discussion of these and other themes within pragmatist(s') thought.

that pragmatists question; other familiar dichotomies are also put to the test – e.g., between fact and theory, thought and experience, philosophy and science, and (as 4 implies) theory and practice[6] (Putnam 1995, p. 13; Rorty 1980a, p. 723; Hookway 2010). (A willingness to challenge such 'dualisms' might be seen as symptomatic of the pragmatists' 'naturalism' (see Rorty 1998).) So too, (re. 4) the idea that practice is primary might be developed or implemented in various ways – e.g., in the form of Peirce's famous 'prope-positivist' maxim:

> Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of those effects is the whole of our conception of the object. (e.g., Buchler, pp. 259ff.)

Or, the 'primacy of practice' could find expression in some anti-metaphysical notion of truth (see Hookway 2010), or in Rorty's (1979) 'linguistic behaviorism' or Brandom's (1994) 'inferentialism'. And so on.

4. Reid on common sense, evidence, and the first principles: his 'third way'

As the list of theoretical options expands and becomes more complex, it is clear once again that pragmatism resists any very pithy reduction. But the foregoing elaboration does at least put us in a better position to appreciate the extent to which Reid's epistemological views incorporate pragmatist elements to an extent not reflected in the discussions we have so far considered. This becomes apparent when we turn back to Reid and consider his views on three notions at the heart of his 'common sense philosophy' – common sense, evidence, and the first principles.[7]

First, then, common sense itself. While, colloquially, 'common sense' refers most often to whatever it is that's widely regarded as true ('vulgar opinion', as Reid sometimes calls it), Reid of course has something rather narrower in mind. According to Reid,

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[6] Cf. Dewey's remark to William Pepperell that "[h]is effort had not been to practicalize intelligence but to intellectualize practice" (Eldridge 1998, p. 5).

[7] Here, I draw upon Rysiew 2002 and 2005, wherein I discuss these matters at greater length.

'sense' is closely connected with judgment and cogitation: "in common language, sense always implies judgment. A man of sense is a man of judgment. Good sense is good judgment" (*EIP* 6.2, 421b/424). On the relation between common sense and reason, Reid says that 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" (*EIP* 6.2, 425b/433).

For Reid, then, 'common sense' is not a purely descriptive notion – it suggests *reasonableness*, for instance).[8] Also notable in the current context is the fact that it is not Reid's view that common sense operates only on at the level of 'intellection': a reasonable person is (i.a.) one who is "capable of managing his own affairs, and answerable for his conduct towards others" (*ibid.*). Common sense, then, is implicated in our actions as well as in our thought: it is, Reid says, "that degree of judgment which is common to men with whom we can converse and transact business" (*EIP* 6.2, 421b/424). As far as common sense goes, then, there is no neat division between theory and practice, or (relatedly) between practical and theoretical rationality.

In this connection, notice what Ruth Anna Putnam says, when *she* tries to get at what pragmatism is really all about: "I seek a philosophy that I don't have to leave behind in the study" (2002, p. 8). And here is Hilary Putnam again: "if there was one great insight in pragmatism, it was the insistence that what has weight in our lives should also have weight in philosophy" (1994b, p. 517). Now Reid:

> 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 (*EIP* 6.2, 422b/426); and,

> [W]hat is absurd at the bar is so in the philosopher's chair (*EIP* 6.2, 444b/475); and finally,

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[8]Similarly, the German, *gesunder menschenverstand* – what's often rendered as 'common sense' –, literally translated, means '*healthy* human understanding'.

Philosophy has no other root than the principles of common sense; it grows out of them and draws its nourishment from them. Severed from this root, its honors wither, its sap is dried up, it dies and rots (*IHM*, Introduction 101b/19).

Next, consider *evidence*.[9] Reid says that "[w]e give the name of evidence to whatever is the ground of belief"; and, he thinks, there are different types or sources of evidence: there is the evidence of sense, of memory, of consciousness, of axioms, of reasoning, and so on (*EIP* 2.20, 328a/228-229). What do all of these kinds of evidence have in common?

They seem to me to agree only in this, that they are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind, some of them in the highest degree, which we call certainty, others in various degrees according to circumstances. (*EIP* 2.20, 328b/229)

Notice, though, that when Reid says that the different kinds of evidence "are all fitted by nature to produce belief in the human mind" (*ibid.*), he clearly means in the *sound* or *'healthy'* human mind.[10] This, even though we have no standard of such cognitive 'health' that's completely independent of our most deeply held beliefs, and our most fundamental epistemic practices[11] – that, perhaps, is just part of what 'lunacy' involves. So, insofar as "evidence discerned by us forces a corresponding degree of assent" (*EIP* 6.5, 448a/481)*,* that is contingent upon our being constituted as we are. Specifically, it is contingent upon on our possessing specific 'principles' that connect various experiences with a conception and belief of what they 'suggest' (e.g., *IHM* 5.3,

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[9] While Reid accords evidence a central place in his epistemology, it is not clear that he would qualify as an 'evidentialist' in its currently dominant form (i.e., *à la* Conee and Feldman 2004); see Rysiew 2011 for discussion.

[10] E.g.: "…in most cases, we measure the degrees of evidence by the effect they have upon a sound understanding, when comprehended clearly and without prejudice" (*EIP* 7.3, 482b/557).

[11] "…such is the constitution of the human mind, that evidence discerned by us, forces a corresponding degree of assent. And a man who perfectly understood a just syllogism, without believing that the conclusion follows from the premises, would be a greater monster than a man born without hands or feet." (*EIP* 6.5, 448a/481). But if such a monster is a coherent possibility it can't be that evidence is *defined as* what forces assent (Van Cleve 1999, p. 18). So if 'evidence' is "whatever is the ground of belief," it cannot be that *ground* is a purely psychological notion.

122a-b/60-61; *EIP* 2.21, 332a-b/237-238), as well as common sense itself. In a 'healthy' human subject, however, "evidence discerned…forces a corresponding degree of assent" (*EIP* 6.5, 448a/481), and the belief so formed is justified:

> All men of common understanding agree, that each [kind] of evidence may afford just ground of belief. (*EIP* 2.20, 328a/229)

> All good evidence is commonly called reasonable evidence, and very justly, because it ought to govern our belief as reasonable creatures. (*EIP* 2.20, 328b/230)[12]

So, as with *common sense*, in considering *evidence* we find a linking-up between questions of fact and questions of value – between our manner of forming beliefs, and what makes such beliefs justified, indeed, with our *standard* of justified belief. This is not, however, a failure to be cognizant of the distinction between "the *quaestio facti* and the *quaestio juris*" (Lundestad 2008, p. 179): it is an attempt to accurately portray the intimate connection between them in the phenomena on question.

Unsurprisingly, the same applies to the *first principles* – the third central notion we should briefly consider. These are, Reid says, *self*-evident:

> [They] are no sooner understood than they are believed. The judgment follows the apprehension of them necessarily, and both are equally the work of nature, and the result of our original powers. There is no searching for evidence, no weighing of arguments; the proposition is not deduced or inferred from another; it has the light of truth in itself, and has no occasion to borrow it from another. (*EIP* 6.4, 434a/452)

Now, just as evidence is not merely what causes belief, self-evidence (/-evidentness) is not simply the *inevitability* of the relevant beliefs. Reid regards the first principles of as *constitutive* principles, in the sense that accepting them is a condition (for us, given our

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[12] Other examples: "To believe without evidence is a weakness which every man is concerned to avoid" (*EIP* 2.20, 328a/228); "I shall take it for granted that the evidence of sense, when the proper circumstances concur, is good evidence, and a just ground of belief" (*EIP* 2.20, 328b/229).

nature) of cognizing at all.[13] A failure to accept the first principles of common sense is, Reid thinks, *lunacy*. The first principles are, for us, and in our view, the "fixed point" upon which cognizing rests (see *EIP* 6.4, 435a/454). Thus, the distinction between self-evidence and being strongly inclined to believe a proposition is real, and is easy to draw at the level of non-basic propositions (e.g., whether the dollar will rise or fall against the pound over the next few weeks). However, since the first principles are *first* principles, their being self-evident and our all being strongly inclined to believe them are, as one might expect, not in practice separable. So too, Reid thinks, for our accepting the first principles and our *being justified* in accepting them: they typify, even define, what (self-)evidentness *is* for us, given our constitution.

If this seems unclear or implausible, note that essentially the same point holds for our beliefs about obvious necessary or analytic truths: it is not their necessity or analyticity *per se* which leads me to accept these things as true. What gets me accepting such things is my *'seeing'* that they can't be false, my inability to understand how things could turn out such that they're not true. Reid, like Descartes, allows that even simple mathematical judgments are not impervious to error. Further, Reid thinks that we can conceive of impossible things – he argues, for example, that our ability to use *reductio ad absurdum* arguments requires it (*EIP* 4.3, 376bff./327ff.). So while the ordinary use of 'conceivable' disguises the distinction (*EIP* 4.3, 377a/329 & 378a/331), even for analytic truths, it is not the literal inconceivability but the *de facto unbelievability* of their negations that accounts for our thinking them true (*EIP* 4.3, especially 378a/330). Hence Reid's saying that "the rules of demonstrative sciences…have no authority but that of human judgment" (*EIP* 7.4, 486a/565), and his holding that certainty, the "highest degree" of evidence and belief (*EIP* 2.20, 328b/229), is not reserved for necessary truths.[14] So, whether it concerns contingent or non-contingent truths, the (self-)evidentness or simple manifestness of certain things, the bruteness of certain such

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[13] This and related ideas are spelled out in greater detail in Rysiew 2002.

[14] "That there is such a city as Rome, I am as certain as of any proposition in Euclid…." (*EIP* 7.3, 482b/557); "…my senses give me as immediate conviction of what they testify, as my understanding gives of what is commonly called an axiom" (*EIP* 2.20, 329a/231).

judgments, is in the end the final court of epistemic appeal. If evidence and evidentness straddle the boundary between the psychological and the normative, *self*-evident propositions, including the first principles, mark the limits of this boundary for us, as the epistemic subjects that we are.

In the absence of any reasonable (i.e., evidence-based) doubt as to their truth, we have no reasonable alternative to accepting 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' (*IHM* 6.20, 183b/169), such evidence would in fact undermine the attempted argument. In this sense, there *could not be* any reasonable (evidence-based) doubt as to the truth of the first principles.[15] So, since it is rational to act on and believe that to which there is not – never mind, could not be – any reasonable alternative, it is rational for us to hold to the first principles of common sense.[16]

None of this, of course, establishes, or is meant to establish, the truth of the first principles: as noted above, Reid allows that they *may* be false. What the preceding does do is place the first principles "in a proper point of view" (*EIP* 1.2, 231b/41)[17]. And, as I read them, *that* is the real intended effect of the other of Reid's 'anti-sceptical

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[15] Which is not to say that it is impossible, as Reid puts it, "for what is only a vulgar prejudice [to] be mistaken for a first principle" (*EIP* 1.2, 231a/41). Even so, we do have (fallible) means by which to confirm that a given candidate is indeed a first principle: see *EIP* 6.4, 437b-441a/459-467.

[16] It might seem that this line of argument involves a confusion of practical and epistemic rationality. But that is not so. For one thing, and as we have seen, common sense, which 'discovers' the first principles, straddles the theory/practice distinction. For another, as Alston argues, "To accept some practice…as rational is to judge that it is rational to take it as a way of finding out what (some aspect of) the world is like; it is to judge that to form beliefs in accordance with this practice is to reflect the character of some stretch of reality. That means that to judge [some relevant practice] to be rational is to judge that it is a reliable mode of belief-formation (1989, p. 21)." Since reliability is central to justifiedness, the latter judgment is one of the (epistemic) justifiedness of the relevant practice and/or of the beliefs formed by means of it.

[17] 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" (*EIP* 1.2, 231b/41); "they may admit of illustration, yet being self-evident, do not admit of proof" (*EIP* 1.2, 231a/41); "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" (*EIP* 6.4, 439a/463).

arguments'. Taken as a whole, they are meant to show, as William Alston puts it, that "in a sense, there is no appeal beyond the practices we find ourselves engaged in" (1993, p. 130; cf. 1989), and in which we cannot avoid being engaged. Both the sceptic and the dogmatist fail to see this, however: both hold, if only implicitly, that epistemic justification *requires* an appeal to something deeper – hence their common belief that the first principles and the beliefs they undergird are without justification. But the *real* heart of Reid's 'third way' is his denial of precisely that thought.

As Reid sees it, attempts to ground the first principles and the beliefs they support in something further are not just inevitably unsatisfactory, they are misguided. This applies as much to attempts to ground them in one or another kind of non-epistemic, pragmatic consideration, as it does to attempts to find some source that guarantees their correctness. Contrary to the sceptic, however, this does not mean that we are left without any reason, any justification, for holding to them, and can only acquiesce in their inevitability and (apparent) practical utility. In a very real sense, their playing the central and indispensible role that they do *is* their justification, and not of an exclusively non-epistemic sort. Here, Reid's epistemology is more radical than the sceptic's, and more radical than what's implicit in the pragmatist maneuvers scouted above; unlike them, he denies that practical considerations are entirely cut off from epistemic ones in the first place, and that any justification of common sense principles and beliefs must be in terms of something deeper than and independent of the central and indispensible role they play in our thought and action.

Such – in outline, anyway – is how we should read Reid on these fundamental epistemic matters. Whether I am right, and whether the views described are plausible, are good questions. But my interest here is, once again, to point out how, given the foregoing understanding of Reid's epistemological views and of his 'third way', we can observe substantive connections to the pragmatist tradition beyond those noted by others. Briefly, then, here is what we find:

Like the pragmatists, Reid is both (re. 1) an antisceptic *and* (2) a *fallibilist.* This, in fact, is among the things that sets him apart from the anti-sceptical philosophers who preceded him (and many of those who came after). For Reid, that even our most deeply held beliefs *could* be false cannot be denied. To many it will seem that, with this point

granted, only scepticism can follow. However, attempts such as Descartes' to remedy this matter so as to head off scepticism, because they are bound to fail, actually play into the sceptic's hands. Surely the better path is to couple a sensible admission of the fallibility of our faculties with an equally sensible denial of their fallaciousness. We can see now why the following claim of Putnam's, encountered above, is seriously misleading: "That one can be both fallibilistic *and* antisceptical is perhaps *the* unique insight of American pragmatism," Putnam says. But Reid saw that too. Indeed, *Reid* saw that one can be both fallibilistic *and foundationalist* – that is one of *his* great insights. Reid, as much as the pragmatists, rejects "the whole project of finding *indubitable* 'foundations of knowledge'" (Putnam 2001, p. 22, italics added; R.A. Putnam, 2002, pp. 8ff.). And Reid makes no attempt to evade (in Rorty's terms) "the contingency of starting points" (1980a, p. 726), to "ground some element of our practices on something external to these practices" (*ibid.*, p. 728)[18]. On the contrary, our judgments as to the justifiedness of various beliefs, for example, are contingent upon our being constituted as we are; and, epistemically speaking, they *ground out on* the simple evidentness or manifestness of certain things.

Next (a related point), while Reid hardly rejects the fact/value distinction wholesale, (re. 3) he does seem committed to holding that certain central epistemic notions (common sense, evidence, the first principles) are such that there is a 'mixing' of questions of value and questions of fact – or rather, an implicit denial that there, there is any such neat distinction to be drawn. So too, there is a rejection of a clear theory-practice distinction, particularly as regards common sense itself.

And, of course, if the preceding way of reading Reid is on the right track, his epistemology as a whole illustrates (re. 4) *the primacy of practice*, in the sense that our actual ways of forming beliefs (etc.) have, as just noted, no deeper epistemic grounding than those practices themselves. As we can now see, however, the appeal to *primacy of practice* is not the basis for "a totally different [i.e., non-epistemic] kind of justification: a pragmatic justification" (Baumann 1999, p. 53) of common sense; nor is it the basis for

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[18] As at several other points, there is of course an affinity here between the views of Reid and those of the later Wittgenstein. On this, see e.g., Wolterstorff 2001, and Alston 1989, 1993.

some argument concerning the pragmatic inconsistency of certain would-be sceptics, an argument that occurs alongside numerous others (Magnus). Rather, it is at the heart of notions as central to Reid's views as those of common sense, evidence, and the first principles; and it is essential to his defense of the *epistemic* justifiedness of the our most deeply held beliefs. One simply cannot understand Reid's epistemology without appreciating this aspect of his views.

5. Conclusion

In addition to the historical connection between Reid and the pragmatist tradition, there is, I have argued, a substantive philosophical connection. In fact, in certain crucial respects Reid's commitment to ideas characteristic of subsequent 'pragmatist' theorizing goes well beyond what has been suggested by other recent commentators. Of course, this commitment occurs in Reid alongside an equally strong commitment to such things as a robust metaphysical realism. And if one takes a rejection of the latter commitment to be somehow essential to pragmatism, clearly Reid's no pragmatist. But the present discussion has not been aimed at establishing any quick answer to the question of whether Reid is or is not a 'pragmatist': given that the latter is a rich and nebulous notion, any such quick answer is bound to be too quick to be good. And a quick negative answer, predicated on Reid's having certain commitments (e.g., to metaphysical realism) which many pragmatists reject, would ignore what I have suggested is a deep and over-looked affinity between pragmatism and Reid's epistemological views.

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