

Making it Evident: Evidence and Evidentness, Justification and Belief

“We give the name of evidence to whatever is the ground of belief.” (Reid *IP* II 20, W 328a¹)

“A proposition is epistemically justified to someone when it is evident to that person that the proposition is true.” (Conee 1992, 252)

“...a central function of evidence is to make evident that which would not be so in its absence” (Kelly 2006, §3).

1. Introduction

As usually stated, evidentialism constitutes the outline of a theory: supposing that justification of the sort required for knowing is solely a function of one’s evidence,² a well-developed evidentialist theory will tell us what sorts of things constitute one’s evidence, what it is to have evidence, what it is for evidence to support a given belief or proposition, and so on. But whether or not evidentialism is true such questions merit attention. For whether or not evidentialism is true evidence remains a central epistemological concept. Answering questions concerning evidence, however, is made more difficult by the fact that it is often asked to play roles in addition to that (/those) featured by evidentialism. And while one would like (other things equal) to provide a unified account of a given concept or phenomenon, as Thomas Kelly (2006) has documented some of the roles that evidence has been thought to play stand in apparent tension to each other; the result is that it’s not clear whether a single theory *can* fit everything we want to say about evidence.

The present paper offers partial and tentative answers to questions like those posed above, while attempting too to move towards a resolution of the apparent tensions Kelly describes. The discussion is structured as follows. First, I rehearse of some of the main lines of Kelly’s discussion, outlining the prominent theoretical roles evidence has been asked to play and the apparent tensions in which they stand. I then present a conception of evidence -- one found in Thomas Reid -- which might enable some progress: Reid’s views on evidence represent an alternative to usual ways of thinking about it. It has, on its own, certain attractive features (i.a., it brings together certain evaluative-normative and psychological-descriptive notions, and represents an attractive combination of ‘internalist’ and ‘externalist’ ideas). And further, Reid’s conception of

evidence gives us a way of preserving a unity among the various roles evidence has been asked to play. Elements of the Reidian view can be detected in some of the writings, both separate and together, of Feldman and Conee (F&C); and it is certainly compatible with the basic evidentialist claim. By the same token, however, the view developed here is neutral as to the truth of the evidentialism. Apart from its having the virtues just mentioned, its more immediate interest lies in its offering at least the beginnings of a fuller account of evidence – something, again, that should be of interest whatever one thinks of evidentialism proper.

2. Evidence – Some roles and tensions³

As various people have noted, philosophers' use of the term 'evidence' doesn't neatly match how it's used in non-philosophical domains. But that's not surprising: theorists often use terms in somewhat technical, non-ordinary ways. More troubling is that fact that there's not much agreement *within* philosophy as to what evidence is: it has been variously said to consist in one's 'sense data' (certain empiricists), 'observation statements' (positivists), what one knows (Williamson 2000), the 'information a person has to go on' (Feldman 2003, 45) or 'whatever indicates to us that the proposition is true' (Conee forthcoming, §4.1), one's non-factive, phenomenal states (certain epistemic internalists), whatever states or processes, etc., lead in some suitably reliable way, to a belief (e.g., Greco 1999, 2001). And so on (Kelly 2006). But while there is much philosophical controversy over just what evidence *is*, there is at least greater agreement about what it *does* -- that is, there are certain key *roles* that evidence has generally been thought to play. In particular, we can – again, following Kelly – see at least four roles that evidence has typically been asked by those interested in the notion to play.

#1. Evidence as That Which Justifies Belief. Again, 'evidentialists' regard the justifiedness of a belief as *entirely* a function of how well it fits one's evidence. But even those who don't explicitly advertise themselves as evidentialists can plausibly be seen to regard evidence as central to justification. Thus, e.g., even if *coherence* is supposed to be the central epistemic notion, *that with which* a given belief coheres is plausibly understood to be one's evidence in favor of it. Indeed, even those whom it is natural to see as natural enemies of evidentialism seem at times to be admitting evidentialist

considerations in through the back door. Thus, e.g., even reliabilists – who try to understand notions like justification without resorting to notions like evidence – seem at times to be forced into allowing its centrality.^{4,5}

#2. Rational Thinkers Respect Their Evidence. This idea is closely related to the previous one – and not surprisingly. “What else,” one might ask, “would rational belief *be*?” And: “Isn’t that just what evidence *is* – the sort of thing which rational believers respect?” Here too, it’s testament to the intuitive strength – or, perhaps, the truistic nature -- of the relevant idea that even those whose epistemological views are rather heterodox acknowledge it. Thus, historically, we find not only the likes of Locke and Clifford, but Hume as well, endorsing it.⁶ But this same idea is just as current in contemporary theorizing too – where, particularly among ‘internalists’, ‘rational’ and ‘justified’ are often used interchangeably to describe epistemically good beliefs (/believings), and ‘justification’, ‘reasons’ and ‘evidence’ are very often used interchangeably in specifying *what makes* a give belief epistemically good (cf. Rysiew 2008, §2). But here too, even those squarely within the *externalist* camp can regard #2 as past controversy. Thus, e.g., Williamson: “Rational thinkers respect their evidence. Properly understood, that is a platitude” (2000a, 613).

#3. Evidence as a Guide to Truth: Evidence as Sign, Symptom, or Mark. It is natural to think that evidence ‘gets its point’, so to speak, from the fact that we very rarely, if ever, grasp truths in a completely direct, unmediated way (see Kelly 2006, §3; cf. Kelly 2008, 942). If we could always *just see*, so to speak, the truth – if things were just obvious or apparent -- we’d have no need of evidence. (Presumably, *God* doesn’t need evidence.) But as we’re at best only very rarely in that position, we need some *guide* to the truth; and evidence is thought to play *that* kind of mediating role:; “a central function of evidence is to make evident that which would not be so in its absence” (*ibid.*). “Perhaps the root notion of evidence,” then, “is that of something which serves as a reliable sign, symptom, or mark of that which it is evidence *of*” (Kelly 2006, §3). On this ‘reliable indicator’ conception of evidence, all sorts of things may fall under its extension – beliefs, experiences, states of affairs, and so on. So long as there is some objective fact-indicating relation between *X* (/its occurrence) and some proposition or state of affairs, the former may be said to be evidence of the latter.

#4. *Objectivity, Publicity, and Intersubjectivity: Evidence as Neutral Arbiter*. Lastly, the concept of evidence seems naturally connected to that of objectivity, and related concepts. For instance, it's natural to think of an inquirer as objective just in case their beliefs are based on evidence, as opposed to being the product of prejudices, preferences, interests, and so on. And two such objective inquirers who share the same evidence can, other things equal, be expected to *converge* in their opinions. By the same token, among inquirers who disagree, evidence can play the role of *neutral arbiter*, a consideration of which might settle the question. (For it to play this role, of course, the evidence must be available to all relevant parties.)

It's not hard to see how the various demands placed upon the concept of evidence give rise to some apparent tensions. For instance, #3 suggests that something can be evidence, even evidence which one possesses, even though one is not aware of its evidentiary status or significance. (To take an example of Kelly's, one might see that a patient has Koplik spots without knowing that they are a sign of measles.) But, the thinking goes, it's not clear how such evidence could be relevant to the justification of one's belief (#1), or something which one, *qua* rational thinker, must always be expected to respect (#2). If evidence is to be something that guides rational agents and justifies their beliefs, it's natural to suppose that it must be within such agents' ken. Thus: "the evidence a person has at a given time consist of all the information that the person has to go on at that time" (Feldman 2003, 45); one's reasons (evidence) are "things that the person can, at least in the typical case, describe to someone else and cite I support of the belief" (2005, 273; cf. Conee 1988, 48-9). So, for example, while we might sometimes *talk* as though the bare reliable indicator were itself the evidence, that is misleading:

"While we might ordinarily say that your reason for thinking that the tree is a maple is that its leaves are a particular shape, the fact that the leaves are that shape is not part of your evidence. What you are going on in judging the tree to be a maple is your belief that it has leaves of a particular shape, and perhaps ultimately you are going on how the tree looks to you (your perceptual experience). These are internal, mental states you are in." (Feldman 2005, 273)

So, according to Feldman (and Conee), #1 and #2 favor *mentalism* about justifiers (F&C 2001) – the idea that justifiers consist solely of one's beliefs, experiences, apparent

memories, and other mental states -- whereas there is no such restriction upon the reliable indicators of #3.

In fact, thinking along these same lines, a number of philosophers⁷ have found it plausible to suppose that the role of evidence as justifier, and as that which rational agents respect, means that it *can't* be an inherently truth-linked notion. Here, the device of a demon world is often invoked: whether or not one is demonly deceived, one can do a better/worse job of respecting one's evidence, being epistemically responsible, etc., and so of arriving at justified beliefs; so *de facto* reliability can't enter into determining what evidence one has or whether one's beliefs are justified (rational, etc.). According to some, this same line of thinking leads inexorably to the view that evidence is best understood in terms of one's specifically phenomenal states (see Williamson 2000a&b; Kelly 2006, 2008). But even short of *that* result, as we've seen, such thinking leads away from the conception of evidence required by #3; further, in so doing, it moves towards thinking of evidence in terms blatantly ill-suited to its playing the role of neutral arbiter (#4) – i.e., the sort of stable, public items that multiple persons might grasp, observe, consider, and so on.

In light of such results, it's not clear how much theoretical unity we can reasonably expect. Kelly writes:

“....Both in and outside of philosophy, the concept of evidence has often been called upon to fill a number of distinct roles. Although some of these roles are complementary, others stand in at least some measure of tension with one another....[I]t is far from obvious that any one thing could play all of the diverse roles that evidence has at various times been expected to play. Different theories about the nature of evidence might thus naturally emerge from different emphases on the competing demands that have been placed on the concept.” (2006, Intro.)

There are in fact two issues here: whether a single kind of thing is suited to play the various roles evidence has been thought to play; and whether we're likely to arrive at unified theory (a single concept) of evidence. I am doubtful about the first but hopeful about the second: I doubt that there's a single type of thing that falls under the *extension* of 'evidence'; but there may well still be an over-arching or unifying role that these things all play, one that suits evidence to fulfill all the various demands (#1-#4) that have been placed upon it. In fact, I think that Kelly comes close to identifying that common, unifying function when he ventures that the 'root notion of evidence' is that of a 'reliable

sign, symptom, or mark' (2006, §3). *Close*, because, rightly understood, the 'indicator' conception of evidence does not in fact prevent evidence's fulfilling its other roles, including that featured by evidentialism.

3. *Reid on evidence (and self-evidence)*⁸

On the question of what sorts of things count as evidence, Reid is clearly a *pluralist*: he says that "[w]e give the name of evidence to whatever is the ground of belief" (*IP* II 20, W 328a); 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 (*IP* IV 20, W 328a). Various kinds of experiences (perceptual, memorial, introspective), arguments, testimony, the judgment of recognized authorities, the marks or signs by which we distinguish between kinds of things, a person's past actions, various 'signs' of another's mind and/or character (gestures, facial expression, etc.), observed connections in the world – these are all things which Reid seems to count as evidence.⁹ In some cases, the evidence prompts belief due merely to some natural principle of our constitution (e.g., the 'original perception' whereby a given sensation serves as a 'sign' of hardness – see *IHM* 6 20, W 182bff.; *IP* II 21, W 330bff.); in others, it requires the right kind of experience (e.g., in 'acquired perception', the original sensation or something perceived comes to serve as a sign of something else -- *hearing* a coach passing, or *seeing* the sphericity of a ball [*ibid.*]). So too – moving away from perception – in some cases it requires the right kind of education, training, and/or specialized knowledge (to return to Kelly's example, inferring from the presence of Koplik spots that the patient has measles). What do all of these things 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." (*IP* II 20, W 328b)

Nor does certainty attach only to demonstrative reasoning, according to Reid. Demonstrative and probabilistic reasoning differ only in these two respects: the former concerns necessary truths, the latter contingent truths (*IP* VII 3, W 481b);¹⁰ and probable

evidence comes in degrees. But certainty, the “highest degree” of evidence and belief (*IP* II 20, *W* 328b), is not reserved for necessary truths:

“That there is such a city as Rome, I am as certain as of any proposition in Euclid....” (*IP* VII 3, *W* 482b)

“[M]y senses give me as immediate conviction of what they testify, as my understanding gives of what is commonly called an axiom.” (*IP* II 20, *W* 329a)

Notice: Reid says that “[w]e give the name of evidence to whatever is the ground of belief.” He says too: the various forms of evidence are all “fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind”. Is ‘ground’, then, synonymous with ‘cause’? No. For one thing, Reid freely mixes talk of evidence with talk of ‘just’, ‘good’, and ‘reasonable’ belief:

“All men of common understanding agree, that each [kind] of evidence may afford just ground of belief.” (*IP* II 20, *W* 328a)

“All good evidence is commonly called reasonable evidence, and very justly, because it ought to govern our belief as reasonable creatures.” (*Ibid.*)¹¹

Such passages suggest that evidence is “what makes us *justified* in our beliefs” (Lehrer 1989, 114; emphasis added).

Further, while Reid does tie evidence very closely to the production of belief -- “when we see evidence, it is impossible not to judge” (*IP* VI 2, *W* 415a), he says -- passages like the following also show that it’s implausible that Reid wants to *define* it as what leads to, even compels, assent:

“...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.” (*IP* VI 5, *W* 448a)

But if such a monster is a coherent possibility it can’t be that evidence is *defined as* what forces assent (Van Cleve 1999, 18). So if ‘evidence’ is “whatever is the ground of belief,” it can’t be that *ground* is a purely psychological notion. However, as we’ve seen, it’s implausible too to think that ‘ground’ is a purely normative/evaluative notion. What to say?

As I've argued elsewhere (Rysiew 2005), Reid's way out of this impasse is to reject that idea that we have to choose between the psychological-descriptive and the normative-evaluative readings of 'ground' -- hence, of 'evidence'. How might that go?

It's rather natural, and certainly within the philosophical tradition, to think of 'evidence' in *argumentational* terms: evidence is that which bears the right kind of logical or probabilistic relation to some claim/belief (cf. Greco 1999, 273 and *passim*; 2002, 562; Alston 1989, 41); this view encourages thinking of evidence in sentential or propositional terms since, one might think, only such entities as these have the right kind of structure to serve as premises in an argument (cf. Kelly 2008, 941).

But this isn't the only truth-linked notion of evidence. For instance, there is a *reliabilist* conception (cf. Greco 2002, 562; Alston 1985, 437): if a given belief forming process is reliable, then beliefs produced thereby are *ipso facto* justified, and may serve as evidence for other believed propositions; alternately, one's evidence for a given proposition may consist in whatever experiences, etc., lead in some reliable process to a belief that that proposition is true.

Each of these conceptions of evidence faces problems. The former seems to fit badly with the idea that experiences are evidence, since they appear not to be propositional in form. The latter, like the view of evidence as a 'reliable sign' (previous Section), is compatible with there being no essential connection between one's evidence and the information one has available to one, from a first-personal point of view.

Whether or not these problems are insuperable, there is another way of thinking of evidence that preserves its essential connection with truth. Here, instead of beginning with the abstract noun ('evidence'), we take *evidentness* as the root notion and treat the nominative 'evidence' in derivative terms, as *that which makes* something evident (manifest, etc.). Just as light makes manifest visible objects, evidence is the voucher for all truth (*IP VI 5, W 448a*). As against the argumentational view (but like the reliabilist view) there is no restricting evidence to sentence-like entities (perceptual experience, say, can vouch for the existence of some object). And as against the reliabilist view, it is not the *bare fact* of reliability that defines evidence. The connection with truth, again, is secured via the notion of evidentness: for something to be evident is for it to be manifestly true; that's why, when I say, "It's obvious [evident, manifest] that *p*," or, "X

makes it manifest [evident, obvious] that *p*,” I am thereby committing myself as to *p*. And, on the assumption of the general reliability of our faculties (see below), those things which we “comprehend [...] clearly and without prejudice” (*IP* VII 3, *W* 482b) and judge it to be evident (hence, true) generally will *be* such.

But while the simple ‘evident that’ is thus naturally read as a factive operator,¹² evidentness is not an all-or-nothing matter; and we usually we reserve ‘evident’ and related unqualified terms (‘manifest’, ‘obvious’) for things exhibiting the quality of evidentness to some rather high degree -- as Conee puts it, “[i]t is plausible that only very strong evidence can make a proposition evidently true” (1992, 252). And, in addition to our sometimes mistaking the degree to which something *is* made evident by something else, there can of course be misleading evidence – something that indicates (makes evident, to some degree) that *p* even though *p* is false. Indeed, even the most evident propositions *could* – logically, anyway -- be false (again: see below). Even so, the important point is that the concept of evidentness – hence, of evidence itself -- can’t be defined independently of truth.

Further, though, as the notion of something’s being evident *to* someone makes clear, ‘evidence’ on the present view – that which makes evident/manifest -- is also a (partly) *psychological* notion. We already knew that, of course: insofar as one has a sound understanding and comprehends some matter clearly and without prejudice (*IP* VII 3, *W* 482b; cf. *IP* II 20, *W* 328a), evidence produces belief to whatever degree is fitting. But the point here is that when something is made evident to me I see it as evident, and recognize it to be true. The conception of evidence, then, is doubly psychological: evidence doesn’t just cause my belief; it assures me of its truth (Lehrer 1989, 114). And whereas the reliability *per se* of a belief’s source need not be something to which the subject has access, at least in the case of things which are evident to some high degree, that evidentness *does* disclose itself.¹³ When something is evident to me, it is *evident* (to me) that it is evident to me:

“Perhaps evidence, as in many other respects it resembles light, so in this also – that, as light, which is the discoverer of all visible objects, discovers itself at the same time, evidence, which is the voucher for all truth, vouches for itself at the same time” (*IP* VI 5, *W* 448a)

But besides these truth-linked and psychological aspects there is, further still, some *normative-evaluative* content to the notion of evidentness/manifestness: saying that something is evident, like saying that it's obvious, implies that it's something that (similarly situated and informed) others ought to recognize/accept as well. Thus, e.g., if someone is standing outside in a downpour but fails to accept that it's raining, we'd say (other things equal) that this revealed that *something* wrong with them, though this failing would be a case of improper functioning, rather than of epistemic irresponsibility.¹⁴

Now, it's important to emphasize once again that thinking of evidence in terms of this 'mixed' notion of evidentness (/that which makes evident) – its being both psychological and evaluative -- is not an alternative to taking evidence to be an inherently truth-linked notion. The difference is not that this way of thinking about evidence severs the semantic connection with truth, but that it also makes clear the connection to belief, to evidentness *disclosing* itself to the subject, and to some kind of normative-evaluative notion of what one ought to believe. When Reid says that the different kinds of evidence "are all fitted by nature to produce belief in the human mind" (*IP* II 20, W 328b), he clearly means the *sound* or 'healthy' human mind.¹⁵

So, just as it's a contingent matter that evidentness tracks relations of objective evidential support, it's contingent too that "evidence discerned by us forces a corresponding degree of assent" (*IP* VI 5, W 448a¹⁶). Again, in some cases the latter depends upon our having had the appropriate experiences, or on our possessing the requisite knowledge or expertise. More fundamentally, though, it depends on our constitution – on our possessing both those specific 'principles' that connect various experiences, e.g., with a conception and belief of what they 'suggest' (e.g., *IHM* 5 III, W 122a-b; *IP* II 21, W 332a-b), and *common sense* – that degree of judgment "which is common to men with whom we can converse and transact business" (*IP* VI 2, W 421b), "which makes a man capable of acting with common prudence in the conduct of life, [and...] of discovering what is true and what is false in matters that are self-evident, and which he distinctly apprehends" (*ibid.*; W 422b).

"Matters that are self-evident" brings us to Reid's 'first principles',¹⁷ which speak to (i.a.) the general reliability of our various faculties (*IP* VI 5, W 447a). Concerning as they do contingent matters, these principles are indemonstrable; but they're no less

certain for that. Nor does our being certain about them mean that it is wrong to speak of them as having *evidence* in their favor¹⁸ -- it's not as though evidence is something we require or fall back only when we aren't in a position to grasp some truth "in an utterly direct, unmediated way" (Kelly 2006, §3; cf. Kelly 2008, 942). *All* good believings are evidence-based, according to Reid. Objections to the contrary (see, e.g., Plantinga 1993, 186-93) presume an overly narrow view of the evidence available in a particular case. Thus, though the evidence's influence is much more easily felt than described (*IP* II 20, *W* 328a), one needn't resort, e.g., to the claim that one's evidence for memorial, *a priori* or *de se* knowledge *just is* that feeling, or 'impulsional evidence' that's not really distinct from the belief itself (see F&C 2001, 64-7). By the same token, however, while it's only when a given proposition has especially good evidential backing (and so is made particularly evident) that there is something worth calling a 'sense of obviousness' about it (or evidentness *simpliciter*) (see *ibid.*, 66), *any* "evidence for a proposition, however weak, [provides] *some* indication that the proposition is true" (Conee 1992, 253; emphasis added). In the case of self-evident propositions, such evidence is carried by the propositions themselves:

"[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." (*IP* VI 4; *W* 434a)

Just as evidence isn't merely what causes belief, self-evidence (/evidentness) isn't 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 nature) of cognizing at all.¹⁹ A failure to accept the first principles of common sense is, Reid thinks, just plain and literal lunacy. The first principles are, for us, and in our view, the "fixed point" upon which cognizing rests (cf. *IP* VI 4; *W* 435a). So, while 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 (especially where there is unclarity about whether something *is* evident), 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. (There are many analyticities I've never even considered, and many (other) necessary truths I don't recognize as such.) 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 – i.e., our ability to use *reductio ad absurdum* arguments requires it (*IP* IV 3, *W* 379a). So while the ordinary use of 'conceivable' disguises the distinction (*ibid.*, *W* 377a), even for analyticities, it's not the *inconceivability* but the *de facto unbelievability* of their negations that accounts for our thinking them true (*ibid.*, *W* 375a-379b, esp. 378a). Hence Reid's saying that "the rules of demonstrative sciences...have no authority but that of human judgment" (*IP* VII 4, *W* 486a). Thus, whether it concerns contingent or non-contingent truths, the (self-)evidentness or simple manifestness of certain things, the bruteness of certain such judgments, is in the end the final court of epistemic appeal.²⁰ If evidence and evidentness straddle the boundary between the psychological and the normative, *self*-evident propositions mark the limits of this boundary for us, as the epistemic subjects that we are.

These ideas suggest an answer to doubts that Earl Conee has raised about the utility of appeals to obviousness in elucidating the concept of evidence, and of self-evidence in particular.²¹ Conee says that when we ask after the evidence of those propositions we're inclined to regard as 'self-evident', "in many instances we are inclined to report that the proposition is 'just obviously true.'" (forthcoming, §1.2). "That does not," he says, "sound like a report of some evidence" (*ibid.*). And later:

"[T]he obviousness in obvious truth consists i[n] an open manifestation – of either a justification or a truth-sufficing fact. The phrase 'ground for truth' covers both possibilities. In those terms, the obviousness of something's truth is the open availability with which a ground for its truth is presented. Obviousness

characterizes the accessibility of a ground. It is not itself the ground. The ground is what gives justification.

We add 'just' to 'obviously true' as an expression of an explanatory incapacity. We find a proposition to be 'just obviously true' when we cannot further identify the manifest justifier or truth-maker, except to say that it is manifest." (*Ibid.*, §3.2)

How might Reid respond? He would resist the attempt to drive a wedge here between the accessibility of the ground and the ground itself.²² In the case of self-evident propositions, what grounds belief is *just the evidentness* of the proposition in question. Remember: evidence for Reid resembles light; in terms of that comparison, it's as though Conee wishes to pull apart light's disclosing various things to us and its being visible itself. Calling something 'just obviously true' may not be so much "an expression of an explanatory incapacity" – an inability to "further identify the manifest justifier" -- as an acknowledgement of the fact that there *is no* deeper ground one might cite.

4. Revisiting the roles: the Reidian view as a unifying account

It was noted early on that Reid is a pluralist about the types of things falling under the extension of 'evidence': there are different types of things "fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind" (*ibid.*, W 328b) when they are carefully considered by someone with a sound understanding, without prejudice and, in some cases, with the requisite experience and/or knowledge. This they do by making evident to us various things. This is the *ultimate* or *fundamental* role of evidence: evidentness is, one might say, the face of truth; and evidence is what indicates and impresses truths, as such, upon the (healthy, informed, etc.) mind. In terms of this idea, the roles of evidence discussed at the outset can in turn be explained.

First, while Reid tends not to speak in terms of 'justification', it's pretty clear that evidence, as he understands it, is what justifies beliefs. 'Evidence' refers to "whatever is the ground of belief" (*IP* II 20, W 328a). But, as we've seen, 'ground' isn't a merely causal notion: it is something like a *proper* cause of belief. Hence the claim that, e.g., "the evidence of sense, when the proper circumstances concur, is *good* evidence, and a *just* ground of belief" (*ibid.*, W 328b), and that "[a]ll men of common understanding agree, that each [kind] of evidence may afford just ground of belief" (*IP* II 20, W 328a).

Further, Reid's view seems to be that, in a healthy (informed, etc.) mind, evidence is the *only* thing that matters to the justifiedness of belief (role #1) – if evidence is what 'grounds' belief, any ground (or proper cause) of belief should be understood in evidentiary terms. On a straightforward reading of the evidentialist thesis, then, Reid's view vindicates it.

Equally straightforward is the endorsement of the idea that rational thinkers respect their evidence (#2). This, Reid appears to take as not really in need of argument:

"All good evidence is commonly called reasonable evidence, and very justly, because it ought to govern our belief as reasonable creatures" (*IP* II 20, *W* 328a));

"To believe without evidence is a weakness which every man is concerned to avoid, and which every man wishes to avoid." (*IP* II 20, *W* 328a)

However, that evidence justifies belief and is something to which rational thinkers must be responsive doesn't mean that considerations of reliability are beside the point in understanding evidence; and this is just as well since, on the face of it, the reason that justification, evidence, rationality, and related notions are of epistemic interest is because they are our (defeasible) guides to truth.

So, consider again Kelly's suggestion that "[p]erhaps the root notion of evidence is that of something which serves as a reliable sign, symptom, or mark of that which it is evidence *of*" (2006, §3) (#3). From Reid's perspective, that's almost but not quite right. Recall that Kelly describes a tension between thinking, on the one hand (as with #3), that it is a connection with truth which marks something out as evidence and, on the other hand, thinking that evidence is what justifies belief (#1), or is something which rational thinkers must respect (#2). (Or equally, between the thought "that evidence should be the kind of thing which is, in general, a reliable indication of that for which it is evidence, and that it should be relatively easy to recognize" (2008, 943).) Whether there is such a tension, however, depends upon how exactly this truth connection is spelled out. What *does* give rise to the tension in question is a *bare reliable indicator* conception of the connection between evidence and truth: so long as there is some objective fact-indicating relation between *X* (/its occurrence) and some proposition or state of affairs, the former may be said to be evidence of the latter. Again, though, on Reid's view it is not the mere *fact* of reliability that defines evidence; the connection with truth is secured via the notion

of evidentness: to take something as evident or manifest is to take it to be (at least) true; and Reid thinks that our faculties are generally reliable – hence, that those things which are (to whatever degree) evident to us are likely (to whatever degree) to *be* true. But when something is evident (to whatever degree) to me, it is also evident to me that that’s so; the reliability of the indication is itself indicated.²³ Insofar, then, as the tension between #3 and each of #1 and #2 derived from the possibility that one could somehow be in possession of evidence which one doesn’t, even couldn’t, recognize as such, it doesn’t arise here.

Interestingly, this way of understanding the truth connection is very much of a piece with what Conee says about the latter: a proposition is justified to *S* when it is (very) evident to *S* that it is true; and the evidence for a proposition are simply indications of its truth (1992, 252). Yet, F&C differ with Reid as to the sorts of things which can qualify as evidence. As we’ve seen, on Reid’s rather liberal view evidence include such varied things and states as propositions, states of consciousness, perceptual experiences, memorial seemings, statements, others’ sayings and gestures, the rings on a tree, smoke on the horizon, the distinctive coloring of some type of bird, and so on. Whereas, as we saw above, some of the staunchest defenders of #1 and #2, including F&C, think that evidence’s fulfilling these roles means that evidence must be ‘the information one has to go on’ (see above), and that this in turn favors *mentalism* about justifying factors (hence, evidence). Again:

“While we might ordinarily say that your reason for thinking that the tree is a maple is that its leaves are a particular shape, the fact that the leaves are that shape is not part of your evidence. What you are going on in judging the tree to be a maple is your belief that it has leaves of a particular shape, and perhaps ultimately you are going on how the tree looks to you (your perceptual experience). These are internal, mental states you are in.” (Feldman 2005, 273)²⁴

Granted: the shape of the leaf can and should make a difference to what you believe only insofar as you are aware of it. Similarly, suppose, absent an awareness of *it*, “[t]he sheer reliability of the cause of a belief” is justificatorily impotent (Conee 1988, 49). But it doesn’t follow that the needed state of awareness -- be it a belief, experience, or some other mental state -- *is* the evidence. Such an awareness seems, if anything, to be a condition on the evidence’s being evidence *that one ‘possesses’* in the relevant sense of

that phrase; and it is the evidence one possesses in terms of which the justifiedness of one's beliefs, or the rationality of one's epistemic 'actions', should be assessed; but nothing immediately follows about the ontology of evidence.²⁵

Similar considerations apply to another main form of argument for mentalism (e.g., F&C 2001, 58-61): we consider paired cases wherein there is some intuitive difference between the justifiedness of the subjects' beliefs, but where the only salient difference between them is a mental difference. Thus, *S1* and *S2* both believe that it's warm outside, but only *S2* has felt the warmth; *S1* and *S2* both judge some bird to be a woodpecker, but only *S2* has expert knowledge of woodpeckers' distinctive markings. In both cases, we judge *S2*'s belief to be better justified (other things equal). Mentalism requires that "these differences have an entirely mental origin" (*ibid.*, 61). But that's far from clear: granted that crude reliabilism about evidence (justification) is implausible, one could perfectly well insist that the mental differences in such cases make an epistemic difference only because they are among the *relata* – the most salient *relata*, perhaps, in the cases described -- in some reliable process (perception, inductive reasoning, etc.). Again then: that the difference in mental states is *intrinsically* difference-making needs to be argued.

"But *what of* subjects in the demon world? Aren't those beliefs justified, rational, and based on their evidence, even though *here* the connection with truth has been entirely severed?" (cf. Feldman 2003, 94-5; F&C 2001, 60-1). The Reidian view might seem to recommend a negative answer: various things *appear* evident to the demonly deceived; but (almost) nothing really is (the straight 'evident that' is factive, recall); so those in 'the bad case', as Williamson (2000a, b) puts it, lack the evidence which their undeceived counterparts enjoy; so, by #1, their beliefs can't be justified.²⁶ To the extent that that strikes us as wrong, reliability can't be necessary for justification; or, in the present case, actual evidentness can't be required for it either, nor for the presence of genuine evidence.

I don't myself find a "'heroic'" (Sosa, in Bonjour & Sosa 2003, 159) response to the new evil demon problem – claiming that those in the bad case do lack justification (and/or genuine evidence) for their beliefs -- *obviously* unacceptable. After all, it seems natural to say that it's an essential feature of the gross and utter epistemic misfortune of

those in the bad case that they really *have no* genuine evidence at all; all of their evidence is ‘false’ (i.e., merely apparent) (cf. Williamson 2000a, 623 n. 10; cf. Kelly 2006, §2). Still, they may be blameless; and so they – the subjects – may be justified in holding their beliefs, even if the beliefs themselves are not (Bach 1985, 251-3).

Still, the Reidian isn’t forced to adopt the ‘heroic’ line. As a number of writers have observed (Plantinga 1993, Greco 2002 and 2004, Bergmann forthcoming), and as should be clear from the discussion of the previous Section, when Reid says that the various forms of evidence “are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind” (*IP* II 20, *W* 328b), he has in mind a *sound* human mind; and he has in mind too a certain sort of environment – viz., the sort of environment in which our faculties are supposed to function. So it’s very natural to sink Reid’s views on evidence into – or, rather, to see them as presuming – a broadly ‘proper functionalist’ framework. (Or, equally, they presume a theory of the etiological functions of our faculties or belief-forming mechanisms – see Graham unpublished; the present point is equally well served by either view.) We can then say that the subject’s beliefs in the bad case are justified because in sort of environment in which their belief-forming faculties arose, or for which those faculties are ‘designed’, what appeared evident to them would generally be such (hence, their beliefs would be reliably formed and based on genuine evidence).²⁷ Thus, we can preserve the thought that these subjects’ beliefs are justified. But we can also insist that focusing on the respect in which subjects in the demon world are just like us -- viz., in respect (suppose) of the purely ‘internal’ facts -- belies the fact that they are epistemically quite different from us, and not *just* because all of their beliefs are *false*, or *just* because their beliefs are *not reliably formed*. Just as importantly, the normal interface between mind and world – including various truths’ being evident to them -- has been hijacked.²⁸

Does this represent a back-tracking with respect to #1? Is the justifiedness of a belief really not a function merely of one’s evidence after all? Not quite: the justifiedness of a belief is solely a function of one’s evidence, *provided* that one is in possession of ‘a sound understanding’ and in roughly the kind of world we take ourselves to be in. The latter requirements are what binds what appears evident to us to the truth. But those requirements – which amount to something very like the assumption of the reliability of our faculties -- are also, I would suggest, very much things that are taken for granted

when those who consider the evidentialist thesis (and/or #1) judge it to be plausible. Absent that assumption, it's not clear whether we would place any particular epistemic value upon *evidence*.²⁹

Lastly, consider #4: the idea that evidence can function as a neutral, intersubjective arbiter – hence, that it enjoy a certain degree of objectivity and publicity. Once again: the core notion in thinking about evidence as Reid conceives of it is, I claim, that of evidentness: evidence is that which makes things evident, to varying degrees. But isn't evidentness (to a person) a *psychological* phenomenon? And if so, isn't it essentially private, and so not suited to play the role of publicly available neutral arbiter?

No, that doesn't follow: First, evidentness may be psychological, but -- with the possible exception of self-evident propositions -- evidentness is distinct from evidence, and the latter can be as publicly available as you please. (This is one of the advantages of the present view over mentalism.) Not all evidence is like that, of course – the introspective evidence I have for my belief that I've got low blood sugar isn't publicly available (Kelly 2006, §4). But *that* isn't news: plausible construed, what #4 requires is that evidence *can* be such as to play the role of neutral arbiter; and, on the present view, it can.

Of course, that publicly available evidence can't play the role of neutral arbiter unless people's responses to it exhibit a certain robust similarity. But given certain non-sceptical assumptions, people's (considered) judgments as to the evidentness of a given proposition *can* be expected to track the relevant facts (truths); and given substantial psychological commonalities across subjects, those judgments themselves *can* serve as intersubjective, neutral arbiters of belief. This, of course, won't please someone who thinks that any 'neutral arbiter' worthy of the name must not include or make any essential reference to human judgment, even when the latter is somewhat idealized (e.g., restricted to those with sound understandings, a lack of prejudice, and perhaps the requisite education and training as well; cf. *IP* VII 3, W 482b; *IP* II 20, W 328a.) But if the need for a 'neutral arbiter' derives from a desire to rule out, or at least combat or minimize, the role of dogma, prejudice, and so on in our intellectual lives, there is no reason Reidian evidence can't play that role. Further, as we've seen, it's one of Reid's

central points that there is no escaping the role that human judgment plays in shaping and under-girding our epistemic lives.

5. Conclusion

As usually stated, evidentialism constitutes the outline of a theory. The present theory of evidence is in many ways programmatic too. But it is, it's hoped, an attractive theory: beginning with a conception of evidence as that which makes evident, we've seen how we might begin to construct a unified theory of evidence, one that avoids the pitfalls of both an externalist theory which ignores the epistemic significance of the subject's perceptive and an internalist theory which denies any essential connection between evidence (/justification) and truth. In addition, we've seen how psychological and epistemic notions might come together in our understanding of certain fundamental epistemic phenomena: if it's true, as Conee says, that "[t]he relation of giving evidence is not obviously within the ontology of any current or prospective science" (1992, 253),³⁰ that of producing belief certainly is. So too, it's not as though we lack any good pre-epistemological grasp of such things as a given mind's not functioning as it should, an environment's being abnormal, someone's being influenced by one or another kind of 'prejudice', as opposed to by experience and relative expertise, and so on. Insofar, then, as evidence is what indicates and impresses truths, as such, upon the (healthy, informed, suitably situated, etc.) mind, it's perfectly scientifically investigable; and its effects are no more mysterious, and no less, than the fact that some things are just more or less obvious.³¹

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¹References to Reid will be given by the Chapter/Essay and Section numbers in Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind (IHM)*, his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers (IP)*. These will be followed by 'W' and the corresponding page numbers in the Hamilton edition of Reid's *Works* (8th ed., 1895), with 'a' referring to the right-hand side of the page and 'b' to the left-hand side.

² This statement of the evidentialist thesis is of course an approximation: one's belief must be properly based on one's evidence. Such over-simplification is, however, harmless enough for present purposes.

³ What follows in the Section is a highly compressed version of Kelly's very nice discussion, to which readers are directed for greater detail.

⁴ Note that I don't mean to be endorsing this line of criticism against reliabilism, or necessarily to endorse any of the various things that have been said in support of thinking of evidence in this or that way. In the present Section, the goal is just to articulate and briefly illustrate the relevant claims about evidence and its alleged roles.

⁵ Thus, consider the analogue of the 'no defeaters' requirement in Goldman's (1979) version of reliabilism: a reliably produced belief may fail to be justified if the subject fails to availing themselves of some alternative available reliable processes. Which such processes *should* one make use of? "What I think we should have in mind here are such additional processes as calling previously acquired evidence to mind, assessing the implications of that evidence, etc."

⁶ "[T]he mind, if it *will proceed rationally*, ought to examine all the grounds of probability, and see how they make more or less for or against any proposition, before it assents to or dissents from it." (Locke 1690/1959, Book IV, Chapter XV, p. 366 of Fraser); "[I]t is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (Clifford 1877/1901, Section I); "A wise man [...] proportions his belief to the evidence" (Hume 1748/1987, "Of Miracles", Part I).

⁷ Cohen 1984 gives a forceful presentation; *apropos* of evidentialism, see e.g. Feldman 2003, 94-5; F&C 2001, 60-1.

⁸ For further discussion of Reid's views on evidence and self-evidence, see Rysiew 2005.

⁹ The discussion is not always explicit and systematic. E.g., in comparing 'the evidence of sense' with that of reasoning and consciousness, Reid doesn't come right out and say just what the evidence of sense *is*. Some of the relevant passages include: *IP* II 20, W 328aff.; VII 3, W 481bff; VI 5, W 441aff.

¹⁰ A slight complication is that Reid allows that there can be probabilistic evidence of necessary truths (*ibid.*). Also, in terms of the latter, Reid clearly at times has in mind analytic truths – e.g., *IP* II 20; W 330a.

¹¹ Other examples: "To believe without evidence is a weakness which every man is concerned to avoid" (*IP* II 20, W 328a); "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." (*Ibid.*, W 328b).

¹² Chisholm, by contrast, focuses on the subjectivized notion of something's being 'evident for S', which is, he says, not factive (1989, 11-12).

¹³ Which is not to say that the evidence always discloses itself. For Reid, it's not always easy to say in what one's evidence consists (*IP* II 20, W 328a). On this point, the appears to be no real disagreement between Reid and F&C, however: e.g., the latter's 'mentalism' is explicitly contrasted with accessibilism (2001, 54-8); beyond the mentalist thesis, F&C's discussions of that in which one's evidence consists take the form of suggestive/illustrative examples, rather than precise characterizations; and, in defending internalism, Feldman disavows the assumption that "people are infallible with respect to whether they can identify a good reason" (2005, 278; *ibid.*, 281) -- which given his (F&C's) usage amounts to acknowledging fallibility with respect to identifying evidence.

¹⁴ Here too, it is testament to the resiliency of the relevant notion that even those outside the epistemological mainstream acknowledge it. In the present case, even Quine -- and in an explicitly "behavioral" moment, no less -- says that an acceptable translation must preserve more than just rudimentary logicity: "the native's unreadiness to assent to a certain sentence gives us reason not to construe the sentence as saying something whose truth should be obvious to the native at the time" (1970, 82).

¹⁵ 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" (*IP* VII 3, W 482b).

¹⁶ Again: "Every degree of evidence perceived by the mind, produces a proportioned degree of assent or belief" (*IP* VII 3, W 482b). Notice that 'evidence' in this passage pretty much requires being read as 'evidentness'. Note too that Locke, anyway, often favors the latter term -- as, e.g., in Book IV, Chapter 2 of the *Essay*.

¹⁷ In particular, the first principles "of contingent truths" (vs. of necessary truths, of morals, and so on); it is these that are most obviously and straightforwardly relevant to the concerns of epistemologists.

¹⁸Reid says: “That there is such a city as Rome, I am as certain as of any proposition in Euclid; the evidence is not demonstrative, but of that kind which philosophers call probable. Yet in common language it would sound oddly to say, it is probable that there is such a city as Rome, because it would imply some degree of doubt or uncertainty” (*IP* VII 3, *W* 482b). In the same way, it might seem odd to say that we have *evidence* that such-and-such, when we in fact have no doubt about it. -- Cf. Austin’s response to Wisdom’s looking in the larder and finding ‘signs’ of bread when he sees the loaf, touches it, tastes it, and so on; talk of signs, Austin thinks, makes sense only where there is some doubt about whether it *is* bread we’re eating, as there manifestly isn’t in the case Wisdom describes (Austin 1946/1979: 106ff.)

¹⁹This idea is spelled out at greater length in Rysiew 2002.

²⁰Greco has suggested that Reid may plausibly be read as a reliabilist about evidence, and that “once we are reliabilists about evidence, *evidence* is not so special any more” (2002: 562) – that is, it is not important that we have evidence which bears some necessary relation (either logical or probabilistic) to the beliefs that it makes evident. I see no reason why Reid would object to the latter claim. But as Greco notes (*ibid.*), Reid rejects this narrow, rationalistic conception of evidence; evidence, in the sense of evidentness, *does* play a crucial role in his epistemology.

²¹ Which is not to say that they put to rest all of the various issues Conee raises in the course of his discussion of self-evidence (or ‘self-support’).

²² Again, we’re speaking here of *self-evident* propositions. With others, this distinction does get a grip.

²³ Recall the analogy with light: “Perhaps evidence, as in many other respects it resembles light, so in this also – that, as light, which is the discoverer of all visible objects, discovers itself at the same time, evidence, which is the voucher for all truth, vouches for itself at the same time” (*IP* VI 5, *W* 448a).

²⁴ Conee describes essentially this form of argument – an argument from “reflective access”, as we might call it -- as “[t]he best grounds for accepting internalism” (1988, 48). I do not think that the argument establishes the need for *reflective* access specifically; and I do not think that the requirement of having access to justifying factors favors mentalism about justifiers (/evidence).

²⁵ Of course, if one is persuaded that there’s no good sense in which worldly things (facts, events, etc.) are accessible to the mind, *that* might favor mentalism: (a) one should make one’s beliefs fit the evidence, but (b) the only thing(s) to which one ‘really’ has access are one’s own mental states; therefore (c) mentalism. But (b) here needs arguing, particularly if one’s opponent is a ‘direct realist’ such as Reid (see, e.g., Van Cleve 2004).

²⁶ This would, of course, be the evidentiary analogue of Williamson’s response to the new demon problem (2000a, 200b).

²⁷ Bergmann (forthcoming, §I(D)) is especially emphatic in recommending the preceding as the proper Reidian response to the new evil demon problem.

²⁸ So too, we avoid the potential costs that come with insisting that there’s no epistemic difference, and no evidentiary difference, between the good and bad cases: see, e.g., Kelly 2006, 2008; Williamson 2000a, 2000b.

²⁹ Cf. Bonjour: “The basic role of justification is that of a means to truth, a more directly attainable mediating link between our subjective starting point and our objective goal.... If epistemic justification were not conducive to truth in this way, if finding epistemically justified beliefs did not substantially increase the likelihood of finding true ones, then epistemic justification would be irrelevant to our main cognitive goal and of dubious worth.” (1985, 7-8).

³⁰ Conee’s point is not to raise worries about the naturalistic acceptability of evidentialism or related notions; as he goes on to point out (19992, 253-4), there’s nothing in the view that’s clearly contrary to a plausible naturalism. For discussion of Reid’s relation to current debates surrounding epistemic naturalism, see Rysiew 2002.

³¹ An ancestor of this paper was presented at the University of Alberta....