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## THOMAS REID ON REIDIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEF FORMING FACULTIES

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**Abstract:** The role of epistemology in philosophy of religion has transformed the discipline by diverting questions away from traditional metaphysical issues and toward concerns about justification and warrant. Leaders responsible for these changes, including Plantinga, Alston and Draper, use methods and arguments from Scottish Enlightenment figures. In general theists use and cite techniques pioneered by Reid and non-theists use and cite techniques pioneered by Hume, a split reduplicated among cognitive scientists of religion, with Justin Barrett and Scott Atran respectively framing their results in Reid's and in Hume's language and argument. This state of affairs sets our agenda. First we identify Reid's use in the epistemology of religion and in the cognitive science of religion. Then we turn to Reid's texts in an effort to assess the interpretations and extrapolations of Reid given by participants in these debates. The answers to our research questions shed light on what Reid would believe today, were he apprised of the latest research in epistemology of and cognitive science of religion.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary philosophers of religion appeal to Thomas Reid's epistemology in efforts to structure debate about the rationality and justification of God's existence. Theist philosophers of religion and epistemologists—'contemporary schoolmen'—also appeal to Thomas Reid's epistemology and philosophy of religion in efforts to mount a response to challenges to the rationality and justification of God's existence. This group of thinkers is correct that Reid probably should be credited with seeding theories influential in contemporary philosophy of religion such as 'Reformed Epistemology,' 'Properly Basic Belief in God,' and 'Skeptical Theism.' The purpose of this paper is to audit the attributions to and extrapolations from Reid made by theist philosophers of religion and epistemologists.

We are aware that the moment historians of philosophy become mere fact-checkers of work in contemporary philosophy, the discipline of history of philosophy gets redirected to irrelevance—which is not at all to suggest that what

passess for business as usual in the history of philosophy ought not be subject to a thoroughly critical review (see Nichols 2006). In our case, we do have interest in whether or not contemporary schoolmen like Plantinga, Alston and Wolterstorff interpret Reid correctly, but it is neither born of a defensiveness about our 'turf' as historians nor of a concern that philosophers using Reid have an ethical obligation to get Reid right. They don't.

Nonetheless we are of the opinion that investigating relationships between contemporary theories in philosophy of and cognitive science of religion and their purported origins in Reid is important for several reasons. First, only a project such as this can shed light on whether, say, Plantinga is correct to describe his account of warrant as proper function as 'Reidian.' Second, projects of this type have potential to alert latter-day adopters of Reidian theories to some of the consequences of such theories. This is because Reid and most other Early Modern philosophers were system-builders who are more likely to have glimpsed certain consequences to their theoretical commitments in the far reaches of other areas of philosophy than contemporary philosophers. As Jonathan Bennett puts the point, placement in the canon of Early Modern philosophers implies that these thinkers are geniuses from whom we can still learn. Third, if we are able to determine why Reid does and does not follow arguments down paths that contemporary thinkers do, this project will help us better understand the interaction of different parts of Reid's philosophical system. And lastly, we regard appeal by contemporary philosophers to Early Modern figures as curious and interesting. A project that assesses the accuracy of these conventions of attribution to historical thinkers may illuminate this ubiquitous but strange phenomenon.

## 2 REID IN CONTEMPORARY EPISTEMOLOGY OF RELIGION

Alvin Plantinga considers himself an intellectual inheritor of Reidian philosophical method going so far as to say that he "hopes to play Elisha to Thomas Reid's Elijah, thus inheriting Reid's mantle (II Kings 2:11–15)" (Plantinga 1996, 333). Not coincidentally, philosophers who make use of Thomas Reid's work in the context of philosophy of religion are typically theistic philosophers, notably Plantinga and William Alston. Their interpretations of Reid's epistemology reveal a great deal of subtlety and considerable knowledge of Reid's texts. In this section we briefly discuss their use of Reid, which begins with reference to Reid's critique of 'Classical Foundationalism,' proceeds to an explanation of Reid's faculty-based account of direct, non-inferential knowledge, and concludes with extrapolation to a Reidian account of warranted, non-inferential religious belief.

The *first stage* of Alston and Plantinga's Reidian justification of religious beliefs is a ground-clearing move, as it was for Reid. Reid argues that figures from Descartes to Hume placed misguided, indefensible emphasis on the use of reasoning as a necessary condition for knowledge. By showing that reasoning is unnecessary for knowledge in countless cases of belief formation Reid paves the way for his account of the automaticity of knowl-

edge. Plantinga makes explicit use of both Reid's strategy and Reid's tactics. As to strategy, Plantinga writes, "Classical Foundationalism has fallen on evil days; and rightly so. As Reid saw and argued, the whole development of modern philosophy from Descartes to Hume shows that Classical Foundationalism 'taken to its logical conclusion', as they say, yields the consequence that very little, far less than we would ordinarily think, is epistemically acceptable for us" (Plantinga 1993b, 85). Reid writes,

The new system admits only one of the principles of common sense as a first principle; and pretends, by strict argumentation, to deduce all the rest from it. That our thoughts, our sensations, and every thing of which we are conscious, hath a real existence, is admitted in this system as a first principle; but everything else must be made evident by the light of reason. Reason must rear the whole fabric of knowledge upon this single principle of consciousness. (IHM 210<sup>1</sup>)

At the level of tactics in the battle against Classical Foundationalism and the privileging of reasoning as a necessary condition on the formation of knowledge, Reid has far too many arguments against this position to enter into here (see Nichols 2010; DeBary 2002; Greco 1995; Hanink 1986). For example, in one outstanding argument ridden hard by Alston (1996, 126–7), Reid contends that there is no non-circular argument for the reliability and veridicality of the faculty of reason. Thus, in Reid's words, epistemological systems that require reasoning for knowledge like Descartes's "hath some original defect; that this scepticism is inlaid in it, and reared along with it" (IHM 23). Classical Foundationalism places unreasonably tight and arbitrary constraints on justified belief. A belief has warrant for the Classical Foundationalist, according to Plantinga, "if and only if I believe it on the basis of experiential propositions that support it (by way of deduction, induction, or abduction); on this view it is required (1) that I believe those experiential propositions, (2) that I believe the proposition in question on the evidential basis of those experiential propositions, and (3) that the experiential propositions in fact offer evidential support for the proposition in question. The Reidian view, by contrast, disputes each of these three points" (Plantinga 1993b, 184). Reid writes, "Reason, says the sceptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception?: they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artists; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?" (IHM, 169; see also Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, 463, cited in Alston 1991, 151).<sup>2</sup> At the first stage, Alston and Plantinga endorse and ac-

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, first published in Edinburgh 1764. Henceforth referred to as IHM. For Reid's works we use the Edinburgh edition of Thomas Reid, gen. ed. Knud Haakonssen. See references.

curately represent Reid's argument against theories that have since come to be associated with 'Classical Foundationalism.'

Reid, Alston and Plantinga transition to the *second stage* of their model. Reid diminishes the role of discursive reasoning in formation of justified beliefs and instead broadens evidence to include non-propositional and phenomenal states like sensory experiences. Plantinga inquires, "if it is not the case that the only propositions properly basic for me are those that are either self-evident or about my own immediate experience, then what other sorts of propositions *are* properly basic? According to Thomas Reid, there is nothing but an arbitrary partiality in awarding this status only to propositions of those two sorts . . ." (Plantinga 1993b, 86). With the ground suitably cleared, they are free to, in Alston's words, "follow the lead of Thomas Reid in taking all our established doxastic practices to be acceptable as such, as innocent until proven guilty. They all deserve to be regarded as *prima facie* rationally engaged in" (Alston 1991, 153). Reid's critique of Classical Foundationalism leads to what Plantinga calls "Reidian foundationalism" (Plantinga 1993a, 183), which in turn forms a key feature of what Plantinga earlier called "Reformed Epistemology" (Plantinga 1983).

The breadth of 'Reidian' foundations of knowledge lies in the *prima facie* justification or warrant that Reid is alleged to give to beliefs produced by a wide variety of processes. When articulating his theory of warrant as proper function, Plantinga explicitly uses Reid in his discussion of most or all of the belief-forming faculties that get chapter-length treatment in *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993b). This pattern of attribution is iterated over memory, belief in other minds, testimony, induction and perception. Given the unparalleled influence of Plantinga's books on warrant on epistemology in the last twenty years, Reid's explicit role in Plantinga's theory is worth appreciation. Memory beliefs are "formed in the *basic* way; that is, I do not reason to them from other propositions, or accept them on the evidential basis of other propositions" (Plantinga 1993a, 61). So are beliefs about other persons. Plantinga quotes Reid: "No man thinks of asking himself what reason he has to believe that his neighbour is a living creature. . . . But, though you should satisfy him of the weakness of the reasons he gives for his belief, you cannot make him in the least doubtful. This belief stands upon another foundation than that of reasoning; and therefore, whether a man can give good reasons for it or not, it is not in his power to shake it off" (EIP, 483; Plantinga 1993a, 66). For those knowledgeable of Plantinga's corpus, this use of Reid bears resemblance to a much earlier book-length justification of God's existence, the underappreciated *God and Other Minds* (1967, reissued in 1990).

Concerning testimony, Plantinga appeals to Reid's 'Principle of Credulity' about which Reid writes: "The wise author of our nature hath planted in the human mind a propensity to rely upon [human testimony] before we can

give a reason for doing so" (EIP, 487). Testimonial beliefs that are output in accordance with the Principle of Credulity, says Plantinga, are "held in the basic way, not by way of inductive or abductive evidence from other things I believe" (Plantinga 1993a, 79). Regarding beliefs formed via induction, Plantinga quotes Reid saying we believe that a given unobserved event will resemble like observed events "as soon as we are capable of learning anything from experience; for all experience is grounded upon a belief that the future will be like the past" (EIP, 489). A similar pattern emerges in Plantinga's use of Reid in discussion of perceptual beliefs as epistemically basic (Plantinga 1993a, 93–5). At both the first and second stages of their model, Alston and Plantinga accurately interpret Reid and show considerable knowledge of primary texts (IHM, 70–71, 129–30, and 169).

The argumentation at the second stage shows that beliefs produced by faculties such as memory and perception are justified or rational or warranted immediately and non-inferentially, without need of reasoning. At the *third stage* of the model this same analysis of faculties like memory and perception is extended to the formation of religious beliefs in accordance with a form of religious perception. Plantinga and Alston develop an allegedly Reidian case on behalf of the assertion that Christian religious beliefs are rational or justified or warranted when produced by this religious belief forming faculty. Since Reid has shown that non-circular meta-justifications for the belief forming faculty of reason fail, the way is open to a much more egalitarian account of justification.

Alston argues that sensory perception possesses similarities with what Alston calls "Christian Mystical Perception." Since beliefs produced by sensory perception are epistemically justified, then beliefs produced by Christian Mystical Perception are justified. Plantinga argues on Reidian grounds for the conditional reliability of a similar faculty with a different name, writing that "the *sensus divinitatis* takes its place along with perception, reason, memory, sympathy, and induction as a source of warrant" (Plantinga 1993b, 86). Elsewhere he says "The Christian believes she knows these central Christian truths—creation and fall into sin—by way of divine revelation. . . . [T]he idea is that the Christian knows these truths by way of the Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit, which prompts acceptance of what the Bible teaches; more exactly, what God intends to teach in the Bible" (Plantinga 1996, 337).

Alston and Plantinga do not show—and do not attempt to show—that Reid himself posits such a faculty. What one can find are passages in Reid supporting the commitment that our intellectual faculties were created by God. These include remarks that "Our intellectual powers are wisely fitted by the Author of our nature for the discovery of truth, as far as suits our present state" (EIP, 527) and that "The genuine dictate of our natural faculties is the voice of God, no less than what he reveals from heaven; and to say that it is fallacious, is to impute a lie to the God of truth" (*Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 229).<sup>3</sup> This however falls short of showing that Reid

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, first published in Edinburgh 1785, and henceforth referred to as EIP.

posits a religious belief forming faculty.<sup>4</sup>

In Alston's case, he writes that Reid limited positive claims about the externalist epistemic standing of beliefs to only those beliefs produced by belief forming processes that are typical of our species. The chapter headings of Reid's first book *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764) reflect this point: Reid analyzes belief forming faculties of smelling, tasting, hearing, touch, and seeing, faculties shared not only with members of our species but also with members of species throughout our phylum. The choice to write a book on the five senses reflects Reid's interest in delivering answers to epistemic questions through consultation of available empirical evidence drawn from determinable, testable observations made about (and with) universal features of human bodies and brains. This transition between the second and third stages of the model represents the threshold at which Alston takes leave of Reid with a bevy of rhetorical questions:

Should we extend our defense to all such practices or should we restrict it to those practices that are common to all, normal adult human beings? . . . Here let me just say this. Why suppose that the outputs of a practice are unworthy of acceptance because it is engaged in by only a part of the population? Why this predilection for egalitarianism in the epistemic sphere, where its credentials are much less impressive than in the political sphere. Why suppose it to be an a priori truth that truth is less likely to be available to a part of the population than to the whole? . . . Here we depart from Reid, who restricted himself to universal practices. (Alston 1991, 169)

A natural question is this: If Reid restricts the application of his theory of immediate, non-inferential knowledge to those faculties that are universally possessed by all members of our genus, then why do Alston and Plantinga believe that Reid's account at the second stage forms a suitable model for religious belief forming and "socially established doxastic" practices (Alston

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, firsts published in Edinburgh in 1788. Henceforth referred to as EAP. We use the Edinburgh edition, gen. ed. Knud Haakonssen.

<sup>4</sup> Whether these and other remarks imply for Reid that, without God, we have no knowledge is a matter of considerable controversy, one around which lines have long been drawn. This issue forms an approach to the question: Does Reid believe that God's existence enhances our meta-justification for the reliability of our faculties? Plantinga famously argues that, absent a commitment to God's existence, one has an undefeated defeater for all purported knowledge claims. As to the interpretation of Reid, verdicts are split. Richard Popkin (1980, 68) and David Fate Norton (1979, 318) argue that epistemic justification of mundane beliefs from sensory perception for example depend upon Reid's naive appeal to God's existence. James Somerville (1995) and the team of Keith Lehrer and Bradley Warner (2000) argue that God's role in securing epistemic justification is 'detachable' for Reid. Reid's description of the origins of first principles varies between phrases like "the gift of Heaven," "the gift of nature," and "the gift of Nature," phrases Reid appears to use interchangeably. According to Somerville, this indicates Reid's talk of God's design of our faculties does not function as an argument for their reliability; rather, these remarks amount "to no more than pious reminders for the faithful" (Somerville 1995, 356; see DeBary 2002, 182–3). Though we note this lively issue, we set it aside since this concerns implications of the justification of God's existence rather than the justification of beliefs about God's existence in the first place, our present concern.

1991, 194) that Alston and Plantinga do not consider universal?

Alston hints at an answer to this question by praising Reid for his advocacy of the "irreducible plurality of doxastic practices." This remark occurs in the context of Alston's response to an objection to Christian Mystical Perception, according to which 'CMP' is not a belief forming practice that produces epistemically justified beliefs because the beliefs it produces are relevantly dissimilar from the beliefs produced by 'SP,' sensory perception. Alston writes, "The objection to CMP I have been considering is guilty of the same kind of chauvinism as Plato's and Descartes's low assessment of SP as lacking the precision, stability, and certainty of mathematics and Hume's low assessment of inductive reasoning as lacking the conclusiveness of deductive reasoning. These last analogues highlight the way in which I have been stressing the irreducible plurality of doxastic practices in the tradition of Reid" (Alston 1991, 220).

But Alston's appeal to Reid's "irreducible plurality of doxastic practices" in the transition from the second to the third stages of his model rings hollow. Alston finds himself appealing to sensible, doughty Reid at a delicate moment in Alston's book-length argument for Christian Mystical Perception. (This parallels Plantinga's use of Reid in *Warranted Christian Belief* [2000, 130].) Alston's interpretation of Reid as an "irreducible pluralist" appears motivated by a need to have a hero and noteworthy historical figure on his side, but Reid's own faculty-based externalist epistemology would not and did not include Christian Mystical Perception or a Sensus Divinitatis. At this point Alston's tone grows increasingly rhetorical and he peppers his discussion with repeated moral terms of guilt and blame that target his opponents. His opponent or his opponent's position is "guilty" (220). His opponent advocates an "unthinking parochialism or chauvinism, or epistemic imperialism" (his italics). The game played by one named opponent (Gaskin 1984) "has been rigged from the start" (Alston 1991, 220). Since these opponents are guilty of epistemic imperialism—and are immoral people to boot, it follows for Alston that beliefs produced by CMP are prima facie justified. Reid himself of course was not above the odd ad hominem argument—or fallacy.

Set aside problems with Alston's argument ad hominem to ask a more pertinent question. What is Reid's actual stance on the existence of a religious belief forming faculty? We hypothesize that Reid's philosophical method and his philosophy of science steered him in this context toward universally possessed faculties and away from enculturated, religious faculties. We offer reasons to doubt that Reid would endorse the epistemologies of religious belief offered by contemporary schoolmen.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> If there is a fourth stage in the model proposed by Plantinga and Alston it would compose Plantinga's offensive tactic against naturalism, viz. his argument that, if one believes naturalism, then one has an undefeated defeater for any purportedly justified belief (in Plantinga 1993). Reid does not appear to endorse the conclusion of Plantinga's argument that belief in naturalism functions as an undefeated defeater. It appears that for Reid beliefs produced by sensory perception

### 3 REID ON REIDIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEF FORMING FACULTIES

If Reid were to argue that we humans have a religious faculty, we would expect his argument to take shape as a case on behalf of a religious first principle, presumably a first principle of contingent truth. This is because Reid's list of first principles includes affirmations of the veridicality of a number of belief forming faculties. Memory (principle 3), perception (principle 5), deductive reasoning (principle 7), and inductive reasoning (principle 12) are all reliable (EIP 474–490). Prior to Reid's list is his discussion of criteria for identifying first principles and resolving conflicts about them. Unfortunately these criteria do not support a religious belief forming faculty like *Sensus Divinitatis* or Christian Mystical Perception. It is not absurd not to believe in God (EIP 462) where 'absurd' has the technical sense for Reid of contradicting the common sense of mankind. Furthermore, belief in a perfect being does not have "the consent of ages and nations, of the learned and unlearned" (EIP 464), and it is not a belief that is held independently of education and acculturation (EIP 467), which implicitly refers to a universality condition. When concluding his discussion in the chapter "Of first principles in general" (EIP, Essay 6, chapter 4) Reid faces a methodological objection according to which it is "impossible to collect the general opinion of men upon any point whatsoever" (EIP 466) to which he responds with a list of several universal forms of belief. He asks, "Who can doubt whether men have universally believed the existence of a material world? Who can doubt whether men have universally believed that every change that happens in nature must have a cause?" (EIP 466). In contrast, God revealed himself only to a certain group of historical people, the Hebrews, and did not reveal himself universally to all. As the list grows longer we find continued stress on universality as a criterion of contingent and necessary first principles but no mention of universal belief in God or religion.

In addition to considerations indicating that a religious belief forming faculty did not meet Reid's criteria on faculty-based first principles, Reid endorsed a first principle that provided the meta-justificatory functions in his system that God's existence provides for Plantinga and Alston. We refer to what Keith Lehrer has defended widely and has called Reid's 'meta-principle'

are regarded as truth-apt independent of theological beliefs or facts:

Shall we say, then, that this belief is the inspiration of the Almighty? I think this may be said in good sense; for I take it to be the immediate effect of our constitution, which is the work of the Almighty. But, if inspiration be understood to imply a persuasion of its coming from God, our belief of the objects of sense is not inspiration; for a man would believe his senses though he had no notion of a Deity. He who is persuaded that he is the workmanship of God, and that it is part of his constitution to believe his senses, may think that a good reason to confirm his belief. But he had the belief before he would give this or any other reason for it. (EIP 231–2, cited in Helm 2004: 113–14)

Our knowledge of the objects of our perceptual beliefs is independent from our knowledge of God's existence and goodness, and most probably independent from the fact of God's existence

(Lehrer 1989, 162). Reid writes, "Another first principle is, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious" (EIP 480). He adds, "If any truth can be said to be prior to all others in the order of nature, this seems to have the best claim; because in every instance of assent, whether upon intuitive, demonstrative, or probable evidence, the truth of our faculties is taken for granted, and is, as it were, one of the premises on which our assent is grounded" (481). Between the first principle and this gloss on it, Reid decries one attempt to ground claims about justification in the ultimate bedrock of God's existence and beneficence, Descartes's.

But in spite of being a dedicated theist Reid shows no inclination to posit let alone argue for a religious belief forming faculty that produces reliable beliefs in a way comparable with other belief forming faculties like sensory perception, memory or induction, and in this respect he parts company with contemporary schoolmen. Why? Are there deeper reasons for Reid's choice, or did he improperly apply his criteria for first principles?

Reid's philosophy of religion, his natural theology, and his epistemology of religion are areas that merit further interpretive effort, especially since Reid does not present systematic work on these topics—an odd fact given his willingness to pick fights with Hume on nearly every other issue.<sup>6</sup> Whether Reid simply wanted to avoid getting involved in religious controversies, or did not think he had anything sufficiently interesting to publish, is hard to say. To argue that Reid did not believe we have a religious belief forming faculty that produced non-inferential but known beliefs about God is not to say that Reid did not have other arguments on behalf of God's existence and God's properties. In his discussion of first principles of necessary truths Reid mentions two principles that are related to belief in God. But these first principles do not posit a religious faculty for apprehension of God's existence or God's properties. Reid writes that it is a necessary truth "That whatever begins to exist, must have a cause which produced it" (EIP 497) and secondly, "That design and intelligence in the cause may be inferred, with certainty, from marks or signs of it in the effect" (EIP 503). Reid allows these two principles to serve as premisses in traditional arguments for the existence of God. Not only do they not appeal to or warrant a religious belief forming faculty, but, as Wolterstorff has rightly remarked, "Reid's arguments for God existence [sic] and nature are entirely peripheral. They occur along the way, incidentally, tucked into discussions of other topics, never formulated with rigor" (Wolterstorff 2004, 96). Reid shows little interest in putting his own stamp on these and related considerations on behalf of the faith; when it comes to articulating a cosmological argument, Reid contented himself by borrowing Samuel Clarke's (Tuggy 2004, 308).

In spite of these difficulties in determining the contours and commitments of Reid's philosophy of religion, we observe a deep seated motivation for

<sup>6</sup> Hume's *Dialogues concerning natural religion* was posthumously published in 1779, so Reid had plenty of time to comment on them thoroughly, had he wished to do so.

Reid's lukewarm relationship to that subdiscipline. This motivation derives from Reid's project to construct a science of the mind by inducing methodological principles. (Tracing the connections between Reid's Newtonian philosophy of science and his theism is the subject of Callergård 2010.)

To see the difference between Reid and contemporary schoolmen on the matter of a religious faculty it helps to consider Reid's criteria for attribution of a faculty to a species: an instance of entering an entity in a descriptive or explanatory account of natural phenomena. As no one disputes that we have powers like memory, perception, conception, reason, taste, sympathy and more, Reid does not need an excuse to structure his *Inquiry* and his *Essays on Intellectual Powers* and *Active Powers* accordingly. But when Reid claims that some faculties are sources of certain types of prima facie veridical belief which are "distinct," "original," and sui generis (see IHM 31ff, and EIP 229ff for instances) he makes ontological claims about our frame that go beyond a mere convenient classification, and for that purpose he needs criteria or principles of evidence for his claims. The subject matter of Reid's science of the mind is human nature or 'the constitution of the mind,' that is, he is studying what is basic, invariant, and universal. In doing so he takes himself to be studying contingent matters, because human nature is the result of choices made by the author of our being. We are this way, but we might have been different.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore of utmost importance to Reid that an account of the mind be correct, that is, that it correspond to the facts of the human mind as much as an anatomical account of the human body should accurately describe the inner organs (IHM, 12–15).

If we should know the works of God, we must consult themselves with attention and humility, without daring to add any thing of ours to what they declare. A just interpretation of nature is the only sound and orthodox philosophy: whatever we add of our own, is apocryphal, and of no authority. (IHM, 12)

Hand in hand with this concern for empirical adequacy goes an issue of modern philosophy that bugged Reid, reductionism. Though modern philosophers had rightly criticised the Aristotelian abundance of explanatory principles, to Reid's dismay modern philosophers went to the opposite extreme. Descartes's and Hume's minimalist models of the mind are prime examples of this phenomenon (IHM 210f and EIP 347f). Joseph Priestley argued that Reid tended to explain the mind by an abundance of original and unaccountable principles when, in Priestley's view, it would be more scientific to reduce the number of principles as far as possible, and preferably to a small set of laws of association (Priestley 1775, 18f). In what is probably a remark directed at Priestley, Reid wrote, "I believe the original principles of the mind, of which we can give no account, but that such is our constitution, are more

<sup>7</sup> Alternative constitutions figure in Reid's writings, for instance Angels or the Idomenians of Reid's non-Euclidean thought-experiment in IHM, ch. 6, section 9.

in number than is commonly thought. But we ought not to multiply without necessity" (EIP, 349).

Issues of empirical adequacy and resistance to reductionist schemes of explanation illuminate why Reid did not take lightly whether or not to posit a faculty or a first principle, or any other entity. His frequent and famous tirades against 'hypotheses and conjectures' (IHM 12, EIP 47ff., and COR, 140) are born out of the fact that he took the aim of natural philosophy to be more than merely producing and choosing the theory that explains the most in the simplest way. The aim of science is to map as accurately as possible nature or creation, and therefore science must try to discover truth or else say nothing at all. From the first of Isaac Newton's *Regula Philosophandi*, which Reid dubbed "the golden rule" (EIP, 51), he learned that the truth of a theory is an additional and independent condition to its explanatory power. Newton's rule read "No more causes of natural things should be admitted than are both true and sufficient to explain their phenomena" (Newton 1999, 794). Reid took this to mean that something more than explanatory power is required for a theory to be accepted as a scientific explanation, namely, that there is independent evidence for the laws, principles or entities referred to in theory (EIP, 40, 51, 102; *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 186ff). Newton's first rule and the message Reid finds in it figure repeatedly through his writings. This does not suggest that the golden rule alone decides the matter of a religious belief forming faculty. Rather, with a methodological principle like this in his toolbox, if cognitive scientist Thomas Reid did not posit a religious faculty it was not out of carelessness or because he did not see the consequences of his own epistemology. It was most probably a principled decision. To posit a religious faculty without sufficient evidence, or merely to "save the phenomena" of religion, would be, as Reid says, "apocryphal, and of no authority," while "orthodoxy" in the study of mind for Reid would be to follow the methodological precepts of Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton. And as we saw earlier, religious belief forming faculties like Christian Mystical Perception and the Sensus Divinitatis do not easily pass the criterion of universality, a key criterion for determining what are first principles and what is the constitution of our mind.

However, it is not Alston or Plantinga that have made the best evidence-based case on behalf of the existence of a religious belief forming faculty. Let's turn to the case on behalf of such a set of faculties as made by researchers in the cognitive science of religion, and to what Reid would say about it.

#### 4 REID IN THE COGNITIVE SCIENCE OF RELIGION

To this point in the paper we have briefly presented the religious epistemology of some contemporary schoolmen, focusing our attention on ways that Reid is and is not used in that context. Then we argued that features of Reid's natural philosophy, including features we would nowadays consider to be drawn from his philosophy of science, indicate that he had principled philo-

sophical reasons for denying the existence of a religious belief forming faculty comparable to Alston's Christian Mystical Perception or Plantinga's Sensus Divinitatis—and anyway, he does not affirm such a faculty. But what if Reid knew what we now know about the cognitive science of religion, which includes abundant data supporting the attribution of species-wide propensities supporting formation of something akin to religious beliefs?

Justin Barrett and Kelly Clark recently offered an interpretation of data from this field in their paper “Reidian Religious Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion” (2010). Barrett and Clark present an account of “Reidian rationality” that is of a piece with the critique of Classical Foundationalism laid out by Alston, Plantinga and others: Reid accepts beliefs as justified—here “rational”—when they are produced immediately and non-reflectively, in the absence of reasoning (Clark and Barrett 2011, 643). Here they draw on Reid's remarks in *Inquiry* (IHM 36–7) about the non-inferential immediacy of beliefs about other minds. Beliefs produced by our natural faculties in accord with Reidian first principles “are rational unless or until one has good reason to cease believing them” (Clark and Barrett 2011, 648). They then remark that we have “good empirical reason, provided by cognitive scientists studying religious thought, to believe what some philosophers and theologians affirmed on theological grounds: that we have a maturationally natural god-faculty, although “religious faculty” or Sensus Divinitatis may be more precise and relevant terms” (649). Clark and Barrett present a summary of findings from subfields within cognitive science of religion to substantiate the claim that human beings are universally endowed with a “god-faculty.” Research on the Hyper-Active or Hyper-Sensitive Agency Detection Device (HADD for short), on minimally-counterintuitive concepts, on intuitive dualism and more suggests that we humans possess innate faculties that prompt beliefs about agency.

This is clearly not the place for a review of the inputs and outputs of these mechanisms, or discussion of the relationship between beliefs about God and beliefs produced by these faculties, but a brief summary of these findings is in order. Emerging data suggest that these faculties are probably universal and cross-cultural, though up to now most replications of results have occurred in Western, educated, individualist, rich and democratic pools of participants. HADD effects are not only shown with adults but also in developmental studies with children (Premack and Premack 1995). Studies on HADD feature as part of a broad research program about teleological reasoning (see Bloom 1998). The data on behalf of minimally counterintuitive concepts is drawn from experiments showing a transmission advantage for some ideas and not others. Specifically, concepts with one or two rule-violations are better retained in memory over medium and long term than are concepts without any rule-violations and than concepts with more than two. Here ‘rule-violations’ refers to violations of natural law. The concept of a zombie represents a minimally counter-intuitive concept because zombies are reanimated after death, in contrast to normal human beings (see Norenzayan

et al. 2006 and Barrett and Nyhof 2001, which report somewhat different results). Research on intuitive dualism shows that from a very early age human beings have a propensity to attribute distinct properties to body and to mind such that subjects attribute mental states to human beings (and to animals) even after bodily death (Bering 2002; Bloom 2004).

Following a review of these and other theories Clark and Barrett argue that, rather than undermining the rationality of belief in God, their supporting data actually enhance the rationality of belief in God. “God may not be directly or immediately involved in the production of God beliefs, to be sure. But we have seen that the proper cause of beliefs need not be direct or immediate. As long as God is the ultimate cause of true beliefs about God, God beliefs may be perfectly fine—even if they are produced by natural processes and God is not in the immediate neighborhood” (659–60). They use Reid in support of this case:

We concede that there is no reason to appeal to a god to explain the data of cognitive and evolutionary psychology of religion. The scientific practice of cognitive and evolutionary psychology of religion, following Occam's razor, should not countenance the existence of God in their scientific theories concerning the god-faculty. Agreed. Science should proceed by the principle of simplicity, and so scientific appeals to the supernatural are not necessary. But the Reidian does not offer God as a hypothesis that provides a better or more complete scientific explanation of religious beliefs. In fact, the Reidian does not offer God as a hypothesis at all. (661)

Reid, they argue, licenses inferences to the existence of other minds even though there may be simpler explanations for the relevant data. Furthermore, Clark and Barrett argue that these religious belief forming processes are not so much “spiritually unreliable” as they are “simply spiritually imprecise or coarse-grained. Perhaps the function of the god-faculty is simply to make humans aware of the broad divine/moral dimension of reality” (665).

The position advanced by Clark and Barrett is undoubtedly the most interesting extension of Reid into the epistemology of religion, and their use of Reid is compelling. Most importantly their position avoids the problem that we argued in the previous section debilitates the attempts of Alston and Plantinga to extend Reid's work into what we referred to as the third stage of their argument, the defense of faculties like the Sensus Divinitatis and Christian Mystical Perception. Given the supporting data Clark and Barrett cite on behalf of positing religious belief forming faculties across our species, we infer that Reid probably would be very inclined to construe the data as have Clark and Barrett if Reid were alive today. Unlike Alston and Plantinga, Clark and Barrett support their attributions in a language Reid understands. We don't propose to show this to be true in the short space remaining. Rather we remark on a few issues that require further research to determine whether

in light of data from the cognitive science of religion Reid would in fact posit a religious belief forming faculty and, further, whether Reid would infer from the presence of that faculty that the beliefs it produces are likely to be true. In other words, we hope to explain in the following few paragraphs why we are hesitant to conclude that Reid definitely would or definitely would not endorse the principles of Clark and Barrett.

In addition to such evidence for faculties and first principles that indicate their ‘universality’ Reid offers several other dialectical means by which controversies about first principles can be settled (EIP, 459–467). A compelling future project would involve comparing Reid’s criteria for including a belief forming faculty amongst his list of contingent first principles and his other methodological principles with knowledge produced by cognitive scientists of religion about the input, operation and beliefs output by religious belief forming faculties. A second task would be to compare Reid’s take on these data with the suggestions of Clark and Barrett under the name of a “god-faculty.” We will only indicate two points here on which Reid might part with Barrett and Clark.

First, they promote the singularity of this faculty with the term “god-faculty,” which is comparable to sensory perception. Sensory perception includes faculties such as seeing, hearing and more. But this may be a misnomer. Reid’s criteria for first principles as well as his criteria for attribution of a set of phenomena under a law of nature strongly suggest that Reid would think of HADD, the propensity for minimally counterintuitive concepts, intuitive dualism, and other modules in cognitive science as each a distinct faculty evaluable on its own merits. This is because of yet another methodological principle dear to Reid. According to Reid, the procedure by which laws of nature are discovered is by *induction*, and accordingly the twelfth principle of contingent truth says that “in the phenomena of nature, what is to be, will probably be like to what has been in familiar circumstances” (EIP, 489). Early on in our lives we need this natural propensity for connecting events as causes and effects, but as we grow up the immediate outputs of this “inductive principle” are checked by experience. “This principle, like that of credulity, is unlimited in infancy, and gradually restrained and regulated as we grow up. It leads us often into mistakes, but is of infinite advantage upon the whole” (IHM, 199).

Scientists look for the most basic regularities there are, and so try to find laws that cover vast arrays of phenomena. In doing so our natural inborn tastes for connections, causes and simplicity easily make us construe theories that are too simplified to account for the reality they are supposed to describe, and it is a recurring problem in science and philosophy that theories too often are proposed and adopted for their simplicity without there being proper work done to ensure that there is independent evidence that entities referred to really exist. In Reid’s view it is the purpose of the second of Newton’s *Regulae Philosophandi* to keep our inborn inductive instinct in check. The rule reads “the causes assigned to natural effects of the same kind must be, so far as possible, the same” (Newton 1999, 796) and Reid emphasizes that

science goes wrong when it sacrifices diversity of phenomena on the altar of simplicity.

Men are naturally more prone to observe the similitude of effects, which may lead to the belief of their being of the same kind, than their differences, which might shew them to be of a different kind. The proper caution therefore with regard to this Rule is, not That we assign Effects to the same Cause as far as is possible, but that we be sure the effects be of the same kind before we assign them to the same cause. This caution, though not expressed, seems to be insinuated by Sir Isaac Newton, by the examples which, for illustration of the Rule, he gives of effects of the same kind. Such as, says he, Respiration in Men and in Brutes, the descent of stones in Europe and in America, light in the Sun and in a culinary fire, the reflection of light in the Earth and in the Planets. (Reid 1995, 189)

Again this is Reid’s issue with reductionism. Reid gives both the Descartes of matter and motion and the Newton of force and laws their share of criticism for expecting that all nature is accountable by their favorite ontological categories (IHM, 211; EIP, 531ff).

This discussion applies to Barrett and Clark’s discussion of a “god-faculty” as follows. First, the Agency Detection Device attributes agency correctly to effects that are caused by agents, whereas the Hyper-Sensitive Agency Detection Device attributes agency incorrectly, by virtue of being hyperactive, to effects that are not caused by agents but instead caused by inanimate objects. Second, the mechanism behind the evident propensity in humans to remember concepts that bear hallmarks of minimally counterintuitive concepts (rather than hyper-counterintuitive concepts and non-counterintuitive concepts) outputs beliefs quite different from HADD. Third, the mechanism behind the evident propensity in humans to use a dualist metaphysics to explain causes and effects in this world produced yet a third type of belief output. In this case, studies about intuitive dualism often reveal that people, especially children, are likely to attribute mental states to persons even when those persons are hypothesized to have experienced bodily death. Envision a three-circle Venn diagram, with one circle representing the doxastic output of each of just these three mechanisms: MCI cognition, HADD, and intuitive dualism. The resulting area common to all three, if in fact available data show it exists at all, will be exceedingly small. As Reid says, we ought to assign the same effects to the same cause. But the effects of the panoply of mechanisms that Clark and Barrett classify as a singular “god-faculty” do not appear relevantly similar. We infer that current results in cognitive science of religion do not yield sufficient justification to posit a “god-faculty,” a *Sensus Divinitatis* or Christian Mystical Perception.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Clark and Barrett explicitly raise the issue discussed here but they avoid its discussion, saying only “We leave aside discussion of the exact nature of the god-faculty: is it a single module of the mind-brain or is it a complex involving various parts of the mind-brain?” (652). Note that almost



This raises a related Reidian point. Since Reid in fact proposes a diversity of principles that seem to fall under the rubric of the general faculty proposed by Clark and Barrett, this indicates that Reid would not think of religion as one distinct type of belief. Reid already has principles of testimony (from scriptures and people), design (to fuel some arguments), causality (to reason about a first cause), induction (to support natural theology), credulity (to trust parents and priests) etc., all of which contribute in their different ways to what is usually called religion. We doubt Reid would hold that ‘religion’ is a cognitive phenomena with sufficient unity to merit consideration as a first principle.

## 5 CONCLUSION

If our understanding of Reid on religion and religious belief is correct, then contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists like Plantinga, Alston, Wolterstorff, Clark and Barrett correctly interpret most of Reid’s epistemic commitments. But some in this group incorrectly believe that Reid would believe in or justify the existence of a “god-faculty.” This group of thinkers considers early modern schoolmen like Reid to be authorities, but one might argue from the foregoing considerations that these contemporary schoolmen tend to select features of Reid’s philosophical system that support their own views while ignoring features of Reid that counter their views. It happens that this mirrors Reid’s own tendencies when philosophizing about matters that represented threats to his own religious commitments. We conclude with a brief remark about this feature of Reid’s method and metaphilosophy.

Reid often appears a modest Newtonian concerned with a strict, judicious evaluation of observational evidence, one who avoids positing efficient causes and other empirically unsupported hypotheses. For example, he writes sternly that “supposing natural philosophy brought to its utmost perfection, it does not discover the efficient cause of any one phenomenon in nature. . . . Natural philosophers . . . have discovered many of her laws . . . but they have never discovered the efficient cause of any one phenomenon” (EAP, 38). Yet as we have argued independently, Reid’s Newtonianism *as applied to the mind* is more a marketing technique on his part than a substantive method (Callergård 2013), and anyway his Newtonianism about the mind appears strongly motivated to preserve his religious commitments to a substantive soul, among other things (Nichols 2007, 19; Nichols 2009). Despite endorsing Newtonianism and banning efficient causes in scientific explanations, Reid nonetheless states for example that each vegetable has in it an immaterial being causing certain effects that are necessary for the fulfillment of the vegetable’s life processes. He writes, “we may draw these two conclusions. I That all the inanimate Matter that falls within our view is constantly acted

upon by something immaterial. 2ly That both vegetables and Animals are United to something immaterial, by such a Union as we conceive between Soul and Body, which Union continues while the Animal or Vegetable is alive, & is dissolved when it dies” (AC 218–219; see AC 229).

This and other examples like it show that Reid picks and chooses certain metaphysical and epistemological commitments to accord with his supernatural religious commitments. Insofar as contemporary philosophers appeal to Reid as an historical anchor for the dissemination of a position, their interpretation of Reid’s system as a whole is beside the point. For many contemporary schoolmen, the appeals to Reid are detachable from their positions. And yet their approach risks cherry picking, that is, picking and choosing only what supports their views and neglecting what does not.

This can be masked to some extent by re-branding Reid in a way that minimizes those of his commitments that arise not from honest, open truth-seeking but from an interest in preserving his pre-philosophical views. One contemporary schoolman plays down some of Reid’s uncomfortable commitments by emphasizing the “darkness” and “mystery” in Reid. Quoting the above passage about Reid’s ban on efficient causation from scientific explanation (from EAP 38), Nicholas Wolterstorff writes, “What lies at the bottom of Reidian epistemological piety is acknowledging the darkness—or the ‘mystery,’ as Reid sometimes calls it. . . . [I]t becomes evident that darkness is one of the most pervasive themes in his writings” (Wolterstorff 2001, 256; see 259). But Wolterstorff masks a disquieting problem in Reid by praising him for his “piety,” “humility and active gratitude,” and “trust” (2001, 260f). Reid appears to select skeptical positions in part because they prevent knowledge of physicalist efficient causes for mental phenomena, causes that threaten to squeeze “immaterial” beings and “souls” out of the explanatory chain.

Picking and choosing like this is a tendency found as frequently in historical figures like Reid as in contemporary philosophers of religion in their interpretations of him (see Draper and Nichols 2011). But this is nothing new, nor is it the end of the world. The important point is that this particular group of thinkers—Reid, Plantinga, Alston, and Clark and Barrett—makes significant contributions to answering the Big Questions and philosophy is the better for it. The remaining question is not *whether* these thinkers are Reidians but rather *how* Reidian they are.<sup>9</sup>

certainly the neurological correlates to HADD, minimally counterintuitive concepts, intuitive dualism and other mechanisms discovered by cognitive science of religion differ significantly. As important, the cognitive outputs of these theories differ greatly. It is this latter point that we fear will greatly reduce the epistemic relevance of these faculties for the justification of belief in God.

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