

Thomas Reid between Externalism and Internalism

RENÉ VAN WOUDENBERG*

I. INTRODUCTION

OVER THE LAST THREE DECADES OR SO, Thomas Reid has been a source of inspiration for a number of epistemologists with a broadly externalist orientation.¹ For them, Reid broke the spell of internalism, roughly the thesis that justification (or whatever it is that bridges the gap between mere true belief and knowledge) exclusively requires the occurrence of factors that are somehow “internal” to the subject. As will appear in due course, many lines of thought in Reid merit the externalist’s enthusiasm.

At the same time this should not make us oblivious to the fact that in Reid’s work we also find lines of thought that unmistakably have an “internalist” ring. The aim of this paper is to identify these strands and inquire how they relate: are they opposed to one another, uneasy bedfellows, or friendly neighbors?

Before starting out, however, some preliminary remarks are in order.

First, the paper focuses on Reid’s views about belief (not knowledge). More specifically, it focuses on the conditions that Reid holds must be satisfied if a belief is to have “positive epistemic status” (PES for short)—an expression that I use to cover various different words that Reid himself uses, such as ‘just,’ ‘appropriate,’ and (as will be explained later) ‘nonweak.’ I shall be assuming that the various words Reid uses refer to one and the same positive status.

Second, I shall take ‘externalism’ and ‘internalism’ to refer to different views as to the nature of the conditions that have to be satisfied in order for a belief to have PES. To explain the differences between internalism and externalism, I join in with Michael Bergmann, who says,

¹E.g. William P. Alston, “Thomas Reid on Epistemic Principles”; Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*; Keith De Rose, “Reid’s Anti-Sensationalism and his Realism”; Philip De Bary, *Thomas Reid and Scepticism: His Reliabilist Response*, Michael Bergmann, *Justification Without Awareness: A Defense of Epistemic Externalism*; Michael Bergmann, “Reidian Externalism.”

* René van Woudenberg is Professor of Metaphysics and Epistemology and Dean of the Department of Philosophy at VU University.

A condition for the positive epistemic status of a belief is internal if and only if a typical subject has special epistemic access to whether or not the condition is satisfied; otherwise the condition is external. A person has such access to a fact if she can tell by reflection alone whether or not the fact obtains. Thus, a typical internal condition which might be satisfied by S's belief that p is that S try her best to fulfil her intellectual duties in believing p. That S's belief that p is formed in a reliable manner is a typical external condition.²

Third, in order to be able to see what is internalist and what externalist in Reid's thought, we must therefore find answers to two questions: (1) what are the conditions for PES that Reid adopts?³ and (2) are these conditions internal or external?

Fourth and finally: one might worry that the project for this paper is methodologically worrisome for the following reason: it aims to distill Reid's views on a topic he never explicitly addresses, namely whether the conditions for PES are internal or external—and hence that when Reid seems to be endorsing that beliefs with PES typically are X, or tend to have Y, one cannot immediately conclude from this that he regarded X or Y as necessary for PES. This worry can be alleviated, however, when we keep in mind that Reid *was* explicitly concerned, as we shall see shortly, with problems of the following sort: "Does a belief that lacks X lack PES in virtue of lacking X?" And if he thinks the answer is in the affirmative, we can safely conclude that Reid regarded X as necessary for PES. And if he thinks the answer is negative, then we may conclude that he regarded X as not necessary for PES. So although Reid did not discuss the matters I propose to discuss, and others have discussed, in the terms I will be using, he did materially discuss these matters.

This paper is organized as follows: The next section discusses strands of thought in Reid that externalists find appealing. Sections 3, 4, and 5 draw attention to strands in Reid's thought that internalists might find congenial. Section 6 states the conclusions.

2. EXTERNALIST STRANDS IN REID'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Externalists have found inspiration in those passages in Reid's writings where Reid is dealing with skepticism. The sort of skepticism that Reid engaged with urges the believer to back up his belief by providing reasons for thinking that trust in the faculties that engender such beliefs is legitimate or justified. The skeptic urges

²Michael Bergmann, "Internalism, Externalism, and the No-Defeater Condition," 400. Bergmann argues there are *various* internalism-externalism debates; the variety is due, in part, to various notions of 'internal,' as well as to whether the debate concerns justification, warrant (i.e. the property that bridges the gap between mere true belief and knowledge), or any other positive epistemic status. William Alston distinguishes various forms of internalism ("perspectival internalism" and "access internalism"), but argues that the one can be construed as an enlargement of the other. See his "Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology."

³There is some reason for thinking that Reid held that PES comes in degrees. For he says explicitly that there are degrees of belief, the highest being certainty. See his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, 229 (hereafter referred to as *EIP*). It is natural to suppose that the higher the degree of belief, the higher the degree of PES that is required. In my discussion, however, I shall write as if PES is an all-or-nothing affair; the reader must make her own adjustments if she is to draw degrees of PES into the picture. I have decided to write this way because it makes for easier formulations and because nothing in the argument of this paper hinges on it (the argument being that many conditions for PES that Reid adopts are internal).

furthermore that unless one can successfully provide such reasons, one should give up believing. The skeptic finally claims that no one can successfully provide such reasons, and hence holds that the subject's beliefs are without PES. An oft-quoted passage illustrates that Reid engaged with exactly this sort of skepticism:

The sceptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive?⁴

Reid's externalist-inspiring response starts out as follows:

This belief, Sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of Nature; it bears her image and superscription; and if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion. (*IHM* 169)

Reid's response to the skeptic's why-question is that his belief that the object he, Reid, perceives is mind-external is *not* backed up by reasons—he holds that belief not because he has reasons in favor of it. That belief, he says, is due to the work of nature, and he took it on trust. Or, as he says elsewhere, it is “an immediate effect of [my] constitution” (*EIP* 467). This response indicates that Reid interprets the skeptic's why-question as a request for *reasons* in favor of his belief; and after implying that he holds the belief in question *not* for any reason he has, he proceeds by specifying the *cause* of his belief, namely nature, or his constitution. This reply signals that Reid is aware of the fact that his belief fails to meet a standard or condition that the skeptic assumes should be met if it is to have PES. And this, in turn, can be taken to imply that Reid consciously *denounces* the skeptic's condition for PES. Now what *is* that condition, and is it an internal or an external condition? The condition is something like this: a belief has PES if and only if

(1) the subject has reasons for his belief (or can back up his beliefs with reasons),

where the subject will have to take his reasons to be *good* reasons. This condition surely looks like an internal condition. For whether or not a belief meets it is something a typical subject can establish by reflection alone, that is by reflection alone a typical subject can tell whether he has reasons for his belief, and whether these reasons are good reasons.

Reid clearly held that his belief that *the object he perceives is external to the mind* has PES. And so by denouncing the skeptic's standard for PES, Reid affirms that a belief can have PES even if it does not meet internalist condition (1). He holds, in effect, that (1) is not necessary for PES.

When we take a look at the rest of Reid's reply to the skeptic's why-question, it turns out to contain more inspiring material for the externalist. For Reid continues as follows:

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 upon reason. Why, Sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than the faculty of perception; they both came out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another? (*IHM* 169)

⁴Thomas Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, 168–69 (*IHM*).

What this passage says is that the skeptic, embracing condition (1) for PES, *applies a double standard*. Perception, according to the skeptic, is not to be trusted unless it is backed up by reasons, but reason (i.e. the faculty that enables us to see, have, and provide reasons for or against propositions) is to be trusted even in the absence of such a backing up. This is inspiring for the externalist in that it implies that Reid held that belief in (the reliability of) our faculties need not satisfy internalist condition (1) in order to have PES.

Now, the fact that Reid rejects one internalist condition for PES does not mean that he *therefore* accepts an external condition for PES. But he does seem to accept an external condition. For he held that it is a “first principle” that the “natural faculties by which we distinguish truth from error are not fallacious” (*EIP* 480)—where a first principle is a thesis whose supposed truth cannot be demonstrated. Our natural faculties (such as perception, memory, consciousness, and reason), Reid holds, are not fallacious. What he means by this comes into full view when we appreciate that Reid, in Berkeleyan fashion, holds that sensations do not intrinsically represent mind-external qualities: “Our sensations have no resemblance to external objects” (*IHM* 176). The sensation one has when one pricks one’s finger with a needle, for example, does not intrinsically represent the sharpness of the needle, but it does signify (it is a sign of) the needle’s sharpness.

Reid’s point about sensations’ being signs is that there is no necessary connection between sensations and what they signify—and no necessary connection between this sensation (sign) and the subsequent belief that something has a certain quality. For all we know, the sensations that go with hearing might have evinced beliefs about the colors of objects! Or, to cite Reid, “[p]erhaps we might have been so made as to taste with our fingers, to smell with our ears, and to hear by our nose” (*IHM* 176). And so there is, in an important sense, something dark about the way evidence evinces belief—something that is inaccessible to subjects through reflection. That we nonetheless connect certain sensations with (the belief in) an object’s having a particular quality is, as Reid says, “the effect of our constitution” (*IHM* 61), “owing to the will of our Maker” (*IHM* 176). It is clear that Reid wanted to endorse the claim that beliefs effected by our constitution have PES.

Externalists take this to heart, and ascribe to Reid allegiance to the following principle: a belief has PES when

- (2) [i] the belief is the product of our natural faculties, and [ii] our natural faculties are reliable: our sensations inform us truly about the qualities of mind-external objects.

Now (2) is obviously an external condition, as the typical subject has no reflective access to whether or not it is satisfied. By reflection alone the typical subject cannot tell whether a particular belief of his is the product of a reliable faculty, nor can reflection alone tell him whether or not the sensations he has are truly indicative of the qualities of mind-external objects. That is to say: someone’s belief may satisfy condition (2) without that person’s knowing that it does.

Let us turn next to passages that would speak to the internalist, were he to be aware of them.

3. INTERNALIST STRANDS IN REID'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Chapter XX of essay II of *The Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, which bears the title "Of the Evidence of Sense and of Belief in General," contains a paragraph that the internalist is apt to find congenial:

That men often believe what there is no just ground to believe, and thereby are led into hurtful errors, is too evident to be denied: And, on the other hand, that there are just grounds for belief can as little be doubted by any man who is not a perfect sceptic. We give the name of evidence to whatever is a ground for belief. To believe without evidence is a weakness which every man is concerned to avoid, and which every man wishes to avoid. Nor is it in a man's power to believe anything longer than he thinks he has evidence. (*EIP* 228)

Here Reid is again dealing with beliefs' lacking and having PES, this time in terms of beliefs that it is or is not a weakness to have. When does a belief have PES? According to this passage, only when the following condition is met: that belief

(3) has a just ground.

It should not be difficult to provide examples of beliefs that do and do not meet this condition. Jane, who believes that Jake is the murderer only because she knows that Jake had a grudge against the murdered man, is an example of someone whose belief lacks PES. By contrast, the person who believes that the industrial tycoon is a murderer because he knows that the priest's first confessor was a murderer, and knows furthermore that that priest's first confessor was that tycoon, has a belief with PES.

Is condition (3) internal or external? That is impossible to say, until we know more about what Reid thought just grounds *are*. So what are they?

Reid says that "evidence" is the name for "whatever is a ground for belief."⁵ Now the formula "whatever is a ground for belief" is ambivalent between "whatever is a *cause* of belief"⁶ and "whatever is a *reason* for belief." If evidence is the name of "whatever it is that causes belief," then we should say that Jane's belief that Jake is the murderer is evidence-based after all. For her belief is *caused* by something—it is caused by something she knows, namely that Jake had a grudge against the murdered man. Thus if we take "evidence" in this way, it would seem *impossible* to believe *without* evidence! But Reid clearly intended to affirm that such *is* possible. The conclusion, then, must be that for Reid, "evidence" is not simply "whatever is a cause of belief."

The other explication of "evidence," "whatever is a *reason* for belief," allows us to make sense of Reid's distinction between beliefs that have a just ground and those that lack one—for certain reasons do and others do not endow a given belief with PES. Jane's reason for her belief is bad and leaves it without PES. Her evidence was not good (i.e. her grounds for it were not "just"). Accordingly, when Reid says that belief without evidence is a weakness, he means that belief without *good* evidence is a weakness. Belief, then, according to Reid, is nonweak, that is it has PES, only when

⁵This paragraph is inspired by Patrick Rysiew, "Reidian Evidence."

⁶It should be noted that I am not using 'cause' in Reid's sense here, as he holds that all causes are intelligent agents.

(4) the subject has evidence (i.e. reasons) for it.

And the evidence or reasons must, in fact, be good. Is this condition internal or external? It certainly *seems* internal—for whether or not someone has evidence, in the sense of reasons for a belief, is typically something he can tell by reflection alone. And perhaps sometimes someone is able to tell by reflection alone that the evidence or reasons are good. But that may not always be so, in which case condition (4), with the clause that the evidence, or reasons, are in fact good, seems external. Hence the question whether (4) is internal or external is difficult to answer with any firmness, if we do not know in more detail what Reid took “evidence” to be.⁷ The simple fact that Reid says that nonweak belief, that is belief with PES, is based on good evidence/good reasons, does not testify to internalism, as there are both externalist and internalist construals of evidence. According to an internalist construal, evidence is something that is accessible from the subject’s own perspective, something he is aware of (or that he might be aware of, were he reflective enough); whereas by an externalist construal, evidence is whatever it is that triggers the production of true belief (and that the subject need not or even cannot be aware of). Therefore: what, for Reid, is evidence?

At this juncture it is important to note that Reid holds that there are various *kinds* of evidence, “such as the evidence of sense, the evidence of memory, the evidence of consciousness, the evidence of testimony, the evidence of axioms, the evidence of reasoning” (*EIP* 229).⁸ I now propose to make a quick panoramic tour past these various kinds of evidence in order to see whether the conditions for PES that involve them are internal or external.

To the best of my knowledge Reid nowhere explicitly says what he takes “the evidence of the senses” to consist in.⁹ But when he says that “[n]o man seeks a reason for believing what he sees or feels” (*EIP* 230), the suggestion is that the evidence of the senses consists in *what is seen* (by vision), and *what is felt* (by touch). Suppose that someone believes that the chimney is smoking. Then if his evidence for this is that he sees that the chimney is smoking, then he has the evidence of the senses for his belief. But if he heard someone reporting that the chimney is smoking, then he has evidence for his belief, all right, but not evidence of the senses. Or suppose that someone believes that the table’s surface is smooth. Then if his evidence for this is that he feels that the surface is smooth, then he has evidence

⁷Contrary to what Jonathan C. Adler suggests, then (*Belief’s Own Ethics*, 136–39), Reid can be called an evidentialist of sorts. As to the role of science and scientific evidence in Reid, see Paul Wood, “Thomas Reid and the Culture of Science.”

⁸He continues by saying that he is “not able to find any common nature to which they all may be reduced” and that the different kinds of evidence “seem ... to agree only in this, that they are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind” (*EIP* 229). What Reid says he is unable to find is anything like the shared nature of whatever it is that is evidence. The evidence of reasoning, for example, in its essential nature is very different from the evidence of memory. The evidence of reasoning consists in having arguments in favor of a conclusion, but the evidence of memory does not—and so it goes for all the other kinds of evidence: they do not share a common *essential nature* (or underlying metaphysical structure). Nonetheless they all have the same *functional* characteristic: they produce belief in the mind.

⁹Ryan Nichols’s *Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception*, the most comprehensive and insightful discussion of Reid’s theory of perception to date, does not contain a systematic discussion of the evidence of the senses, nor of the relation between this kind of evidence and belief.

of the senses for his belief. But if he read in a book that it is smooth, then he has evidence for his belief, to be sure, but not evidence of the senses. The difference between having “evidence of the senses” for one’s belief and having other kinds of evidence for it, then, has to do with whether or not one’s senses are involved in forming and grounding the belief in question—that is with whether or not one sees, hears, touches, tastes, or smells certain things. There is, for Reid, a connection between the evidence of the senses and sensations (*IHM* 101–2): the evidence of the senses consists in the presence of the sensations that go with seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. So, or so I suggest, it is Reid’s view that the “evidence of the senses” possessed by someone who believes with PES that the chimney is smoking is the sensations that go with seeing that the chimney is smoking. A belief held in the absence of evidence of the senses (as well as of other kinds of evidence) would be without PES and a display of weakness. This suggests that a belief (and this will be a perceptual belief) has PES when

(5) the subject has evidence of the senses for it.

Is this condition internal? That is, can the typical subject tell, by reflection alone, whether he has evidence of the senses for her belief? It seems he can. When John believes that the chimney is smoking on the basis of seeing that the chimney is smoking, he can typically tell by reflection alone that the evidence of the senses (visual in this case) is present. And when he believes that the table’s surface is smooth on the basis of feeling or sensing that it is smooth, he can typically tell by reflection alone that the evidence of the senses (tactile in this case) is present. We must go even further: the role of the evidence in these cases is such that were the subject, even after careful reflection, unable to tell whether or not evidence is present, the beliefs either would not be formed, or, if already formed, would no longer be maintained. At least Reid seems to suggest as much when he says that “it [is not] in a man’s power to believe anything longer than he thinks he has evidence” (*EIP* 228), which quite plainly suggests that Reid takes *thinking that one has evidence for it* to be necessary for having a particular belief. And this is clearly an internal condition, as someone can tell by reflection alone whether or not he has evidence for a particular belief of his. Since this condition holds for all kinds of evidence, it holds a fortiori for the evidence of the senses. And this reinforces the conclusion that condition (5), at least for visual and tactile evidence, is an internal condition, and furthermore that Reid understood it to be so. (This line of reasoning of course suggests that all other conditions for PES involving evidence are likewise internal, and furthermore that Reid understood them to be so. Still, a closer look at the other kinds of evidence will be helpful.)

What I have been saying of visual and tactile evidence also holds for the evidence of smell, taste, and hearing. Subjects typically can tell by reflection alone whether or not any of these kinds of evidence is present. Furthermore the evidence is such that without awareness of the evidence, beliefs would either not be formed, or, if already formed, no longer maintained the moment the subject thinks he has no evidence for them. Hence condition (5) is, quite generally, an internal condition; and I submit that Reid understood it to be so.

Before moving on to the other kinds of evidence that Reid lists, I should like to do two more things—first, indicate how my take on evidence of the senses relates to what Reid says about “signs,” and second, make an important qualification of what I have said so far about (5)’s being an internal condition.

First, then, a point about “signs.” I have said that it is natural to take “the evidence of the senses” to be sensations. Now Reid over and over again talks of sensations as “signs”: the sensations one has when one, for example, perceives an apple (tactile, visual, etc.) are natural signs of the apple’s qualities, they indicate to us the presence of the qualities of the apple.¹⁰ As I pointed out earlier, Reid holds that sensations do not intrinsically represent mind-external qualities: the sensation one has upon pricking one’s finger with it does not intrinsically represent the sharpness of the needle, but it does signify (it is a sign of) the needle’s sharpness. Reid’s point is that there is no necessary connection between sensations and what they signify—and no necessary connection between this sensation (sign) and the consequent belief that something has a certain quality. What does this mean for condition (5)? Does it render (5) an external condition after all? It does not. For two questions should be clearly distinguished: (A) whether we can tell by reflection alone whether certain evidence of the senses is present; and (B) whether we can tell by reflection alone why it is that sensations of a certain kind signify certain qualities, and why it is that those sensations induce us to believe that the objects perceived possess those qualities. Question (A), as I have been arguing, can be answered in the affirmative for condition (5), which is my reason for saying that (5) is an internal condition. Question (B), as Reid held, cannot be answered in the affirmative for condition (5), as a subject cannot typically tell by reflection alone that sensations provide reliable evidence for objects in the world. This is true, but it does not turn (5) into an external condition, as it requires only that the subject can answer (A). What it does indicate, though, as I pointed out at the end of the previous section, is that Reid adopted an external condition as necessary for PES, namely (2).

As to the qualification: Reid expressly stated¹¹ that whereas visual sensations are evidence for visual beliefs, most often we are unaware of our visual sensations, even upon reflection. Upon having the visual sensations that go with seeing a happy face, you immediately form the belief that that the person whose face you are seeing is happy. Your belief is based on evidence; hence it is nonweak and possesses PES. Still, even upon reflection you might not become aware of what your visual sensations are (so as to distinguish them from sensations that signify a tired face). So for visual beliefs condition (5) can be satisfied, and those beliefs can have PES, while (5) is external. For you typically cannot tell by reflection alone

¹⁰An excellent discussion of Reid’s theory of signs is Nichols’s *Thomas Reid’s Theory of Perception*, chapters 3 and 4. Especially good is the discussion (86–91) of the various kinds of natural signs that Reid distinguishes: experiential signs (e.g. the sound of the fire engine signifies the presence of a fire engine), instinctual signs (e.g. an acrid smell signals not to ingest that which is emanating the smell), and constitutional signs (e.g. certain sensations of touch inform us of the hardness of bodies). Constitutional signs are the building blocks of all perceptual beliefs, and are the signs upon which the experiential signs are built. Another discussion of Reid on signs is Esther R. Kroeker, “Reid on Natural Signs, Taste, and Moral Perception.”

¹¹See *IHM* 101–2.

what the evidence (sensations) indicating happiness (as opposed to tiredness) is. (And you may think you *have* evidence for your belief, even if you are unable to spell out what the evidence is.)

What this indicates is that for Reid, not all types of sensory evidence work the same way. Some types, in at least certain sorts of cases, require conscious awareness if they are to function as evidence for certain beliefs and if they are to produce the beliefs. But other types of evidence do not.

Let us now move on to the evidence of memory, and to beliefs based on it. An example of a memory belief is my belief that I have been to Scotland many times. For this belief I have, let us suppose, the evidence of memory. But what does this evidence consist in, what is the evidence of memory? Reid nowhere explicitly says what it is, but his discussion suggests that it consists of “remembrances,” or “memories” (see *EIP* 253–54). So the evidence of memory that I have for my belief that I have been to Scotland many times is my remembrance of having been there many times. Reid is careful to distinguish remembrance from belief, even though, as he says, “memory is always accompanied by belief” (*EIP* 254). The relation between the two is this: the remembrance or memory is the *evidence* on which the belief is based. Now it may be difficult to specify in any detail what remembrances or memories *are* (are they propositional in nature or not?), but it seems clear that we *have* remembrances or memories. And some of our memories are distinct, others indistinct. If we put these points together, we may say that according to Reid, a memory belief¹² is nonweak and has PES only when

(6) the subject has the evidence of a distinct memory for it.

Is this condition internal or external? It seems internal, as the typical subject can tell by reflection alone whether or not it is satisfied. Reflective awareness of the evidence even seems required for the production or maintenance of the memory belief—or, as Reid says, you will not have that belief unless you think you have evidence for it. This point can be clarified as follows: Suppose that you believe that you have once visited Aberdeen, and that your only evidence for it is the evidence of memory. Then your belief is nonweak and has PES. But suppose now that you contract amnesia and you no longer have the evidence of memory. Then you will no longer believe you have once visited Aberdeen (at least if you have no other evidence for it, such as evidence of testimony). Awareness of evidence is required for a memory belief’s having PES, and so (6) is an internal condition.

The next kind of evidence on Reid’s list is “the evidence of consciousness.” It is the evidence you have for such beliefs as that you feel tired (when you feel tired), or long for a drink (e.g. when you are thirsty), or are thinking that you prefer Paris over Potsdam (in case you do). The evidence here consists neither in perceptual sensations, nor in memories, but in being conscious of your fatigue, thirst, or thought. If we assume that you do not have (even cannot have) other evidence for these beliefs, you need to have this specific type of evidence for them

¹²When Reid writes about memory, he writes about personal memory, and so about memories one has of what one oneself has experienced in the past; he is not writing about factual memories, memories of the sort that are talked about in the sentence ‘I remember it was the Rubicon that Caesar crossed.’ See René Van Woudenberg, “Thomas Reid on Memory and the Identity of Persons.”

if they are to be nonweak and have PES. A belief about a conscious state, then, for Reid, has PES only when

(7) the subject has the evidence of consciousness for it.

This is clearly an internal condition, for the typical subject can tell by reflection alone whether he has this evidence. We might even go further and say that whenever this kind of evidence is absent, the subject will not form the beliefs in the first place, and furthermore that whenever this evidence is present, the subject will be conscious of it—it being impossible for a subject to be unaware of the evidence of consciousness!

For most of us the evidence for such beliefs as that “William the Silent married four times” and “Jane has pneumonia” consists in testimony that has come our way. The evidence of testimony is very different from evidence that consists in sensations, memory, or consciousness. It consists in having heard it said, or having read, that something or other is the case, something we have not observed or noticed for ourselves—and having had no reasons to reject what we heard or read. Somewhat schematically, we may say that in case of S’s testimonial belief that *p*, the evidence for S’s belief is *testifier A’s testimony that p*. Testimonial belief, Reid clearly implies, can be nonweak and have PES precisely because of this evidence. Testimonial belief, then, has PES only when

(8) the subject has testimonial evidence for it.

Is this condition internal or external? There is no simple answer to this question, because various sorts of cases need to be distinguished. In one sort, subjects have testimonial evidence for their belief, and they can tell by reflection alone what the evidence is—for example testifier A’s testimony that *p*, or book B’s saying that *p*, or having heard it said that *p*. In cases of the second sort, subjects have testimonial evidence for *p*, and they have formed the belief that *p because of the evidence*, but they have later on forgotten what the evidence is, although they have retained the belief. But although they have forgotten what the evidence is, they know that there *is* (in some objective sense) such evidence, and that they were once in possession of it. If we assume that beliefs of both sorts can have PES, we must say that beliefs of the first sort satisfy condition (8), and that in those cases the condition is internal—for the subject can tell by reflection alone what evidence he has for his belief. In cases of the second sort, as we assume, condition (8) is met as well; but is it then external? Well, in the second sort of case the subject still believes that there *is* (in some objective sense) evidence for his belief—and this belief may suffice to satisfy (8). Does this turn (8) into an external condition? There is something about evidence that the subject *can* tell by reflection alone (namely that there is, in some objective sense, evidence for his belief), but there is another thing about evidence that he *cannot* so tell (that A testified that *p*). We may perhaps say that in the second sort of case (8) is less internal than in the first sort. But in both cases the condition is internal. For had the subject not even thought that there *was* evidence for his belief, he would not have had the belief in the first place. Testimonial belief, then, can have PES, and condition (8) for it is internal—although sometimes more than at other times.

The point that I have been making about Reid's views on testimony and evidence is, of course, entirely compatible with an important point that has been made about this topic in the literature, namely that it was Reid's view that beliefs we acquire via testimony can have PES even *without* the subject's having any belief with PES about the epistemic credentials of the testifier.¹³ "A's testimony that *p*" can constitute evidence (evidence that S may be aware of) even when S holds no beliefs with PES about the credentials of the testifier.

The 'evidence of axioms' is Reid's term for the evidence we have for beliefs in the axioms of mathematics, morals, and metaphysics—axioms that Reid held are necessarily true. (*EIP* 233; 490-3) The evidence here consists not in sensations we might have, or memories, or the evidence of consciousness, or testimony; it consists in intuitively "seeing" that these propositions must be true. Says Reid, "When I see a proposition to be self-evident and necessary, and that the subject is plainly included in the predicate, there seems to be nothing more that I can desire, in order to understand why I believe it. ... The light of truth so fills my mind in these cases, that I can neither conceive, nor desire anything more satisfying" (*EIP* 233). Belief in self-evident and necessarily true axioms, then, has PES (at least in the absence of other possible evidence for them, such as testimonial evidence) only when

(9) the subject has intuitive evidence for the proposition.

Is condition (9) internal or external? The answer must clearly be that it is internal, for the typical subject can tell by reflection alone whether or not the intuitive evidence is present. We may even go further and say that this kind of evidence is such that when it is present one cannot but be aware of it, and that without the awareness of it (and assuming one has no other evidence) the belief would not have been formed in the first place.

The last item on Reid's list is "the evidence of reasoning," which must be understood as "the evidence of propositions that are inferred by reasoning, from propositions already known and believed" (*EIP* 230). To return to an earlier example, when someone believes (C) that the industrial tycoon is a murderer because he knows (1) that the priest's first confessant was that tycoon, and furthermore (2) that the priest's first confessor was a murderer, then his evidence for his belief is the evidence of reasoning. That evidence, Reid implies, gives the belief in (C) PES. With respect to belief in the conclusion of an argument (on the basis of that argument), then, a necessary condition for PES is that

(10) the subject has the evidence of reasoning for it.

This condition, which is just an alternative formulation of (1), is clearly internal. The subject typically has special epistemic access to the evidence of reasoning: he is typically aware of the premises that entail the conclusion. It would even seem that the premises could not be evidence for belief in (C) unless the subject is aware of them. (That [10] is an internal condition became evident already in section

¹³C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, and "Reid and the Social Operations of the Mind."

2, where we observed how Reid rejected the skeptic's unwieldy application of the internalist condition [1].)

This overview establishes a number of points. First, it confirms what we saw in the previous section, that Reid holds that not all evidence for one's beliefs consists in argumentative reasons that back up the belief. It is not the case that beliefs have PES only when condition (1) (or [10]) is satisfied, as the skeptic assumed.

Second, it shows that for Reid, beliefs have PES provided one of the conditions (5), (6), (7), (9), or (10) is satisfied.

Third, it shows that according to a natural reading, a number of these conditions are in fact *internal* conditions ([6], [7], [9] and [10]), whereas the others ([5] and [8]) are sometimes external but other times internal.

A fourth point that was suggested is that some kinds of evidence are such that awareness of evidence is required *if it is to function as evidence* for certain beliefs, that is if it is to prompt belief in the first place—and furthermore propel it in such a way that it provides it with PES. This holds especially for the evidence of memory, the evidence of testimony (in varying degrees), the evidence of axioms, and the evidence of reasoning; it also holds for certain parts of the evidence of the senses.

Especially this third point speaks to the internalist, in that it suggests that Reid's epistemology contains more internalist elements than anybody has ever cared to state. But the fourth point speaks to the internalist as well.

Still, and this is the fifth point, an externalist element is present in Reid's claim that even when one is aware of the evidence for belief in various contingent propositions, one is still "in the dark" about how *this* evidence produces *that* belief. In order for those beliefs to have PES, besides the relevant internal condition, external condition (2) also needs to be satisfied. And I have suggested that according to Reid, belief in necessary and self-evident axioms too requires for PES the satisfaction of (2).

4. THE INTERNALIST'S CASE CONTINUED: EVIDENCE FOR FIRST PRINCIPLES

The internalist finds more to his liking in Reid. He notes that the skeptic whom Reid engages with urges that belief in the proposition

(P) The external objects we perceive do actually exist external to our minds

is without PES, because belief in (P) does not satisfy condition (1). Next he notes that proposition (P) is one of a number of propositions that Reid calls "first principles" (*EIP* 476), and that Reid holds that belief in first principles has PES. He further notes that Reid thinks that to believe without evidence (that is to believe something without PES) is a weakness. This prompts the question of what Reid thinks is the evidence for (P), and for other first principles. The answer, he claims, reveals why Reid is his ally.

As indicated, proposition (P) is a "first principle" alongside others, such as for example the propositions that "the thoughts of which I am conscious, are the thoughts of a being which I call myself" (*EIP* 472) and that "[t]hose things did really happen which I distinctly remember" (*EIP* 474). Reid holds that there is evidence for belief in them: "Their evidence is not demonstrative, but intuitive"

(*EIP* 41). And the first principles “may admit of illustration, yet being self-evident, do not admit of proof” (*EIP* 40). So there is, Reid affirms, evidence of a certain kind for first principles. And he clearly thinks that kind is good—sufficient to endow beliefs in them with PES.

What is the essential nature of this intuitive evidence for (P)? How does it work? As we saw in the previous section, Reid thinks that intuitive evidence differs from the evidence of the senses, the evidence of memory, the evidence of consciousness, and the evidence of testimony. It also differs from the evidence of reasoning. Thus Reid is saying in effect that the skeptic who asks for evidence for belief in (P) is looking in the wrong place when he is looking for *argumentative* evidence. For the evidence for (P) consists of “perceiving without reasoning” that it is true. The evidence for (P) is that one directly (but nonvisually) perceives P’s truth. And one can perceive (P)’s truth because (P) is self-evident. This claim on Reid’s part has puzzled many, because (P) does not seem to be self-evident in the classical sense: it is not the case that the moment one understands (P)’s content, one sees that it is true. This has sparked a rather interesting discussion about the tenability of Reid’s views on this point.¹⁴ Given the aim of this paper, however, I need not go into this. For my aim is not to find out whether Reid’s views are tenable, but what they are. And the question now is: is this intuitive evidence that Reid claims to be available for belief in (P) (as well as for belief in other first principles) such that the typical subject can tell by reflection alone whether it is present? This, of course, was already discussed in the previous section, but given the importance, for Reid, of the skeptic’s urge and of his commitment to the claim that belief in first principles has PES, a closer look at what Reid says about the evidence of first principles is merited.

There are ways in which the evidence of first principles may be made more apparent when they are brought into dispute; but they require to be handled in a way peculiar to themselves. Their evidence is not demonstrative, but intuitive. They require not proof, but to be placed in a proper point of view. (*EIP* 41)

When first principles are disputed, the evidence for them, Reid says here, can be “made more apparent,” which implies that before the event of “making the evidence more apparent,” the evidence was already apparent, to some degree, and hence such that the subject is aware of it. The internalist’s gloss on the quotation, however, might be thought to be controverted by what Reid says much later in *EIP* about first principles:

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

¹⁴Important contributions to this discussion include Alston “Thomas Reid on Epistemic Principles”; James Van Cleve, “Thomas Reid on the First Principles of Contingent Truths”; De Bary, *Thomas Reid and Scepticism*; and most recently Rysiew, “Reidian Evidence.”

Does not Reid say here that there is “no evidence” for first principles, hence was the internalist’s gloss not an overinterpretation? No, it was not, for Reid does not say there is “no evidence” for first principles. What he says is that there is “no searching for evidence.” The evidence need not be searched for (as in the case of a proposition whose evidence consists of an argument) because it is *already present* and in full view: the first principle “has the light of truth in itself.” “The light of truth” is the special intuitive kind of evidence for first principles. The intuitive evidence is such that the subject needs to be aware of it if it is to propel belief in those principles in the first place; and the subject also needs to be aware of it if it is to endow the belief in first principles with PES. Thus this condition is internal.

Reid acknowledges that there are great differences of opinion about first principles, and that philosophers have disputed which propositions are truly first principles. Thus the question arises whether the evidence for them “can be made more apparent.” Reid thinks it can. The most important thing he says in this connection is that “although it is contrary to the nature of first principles to admit of direct or *apodictical* proof; yet there are certain ways of reasoning even about them, by which those that are just and solid may be confirmed, and those that are false may be detected” (*EIP* 463). So there are ways of reasoning that provide evidence for first principles. What ways? Says Reid, “A first principle may admit of a proof *ad absurdum*” (*EIP* 463). The idea is that when someone denies a first principle, this will have absurd implications—and this is evidence for the truth of the principle. And of course this kind of evidence can only lead to belief in the principle, if the subject sees and accordingly is aware of the ensuing absurdity.

Again my point is not to argue that what Reid says is correct, but to highlight that (a) Reid held that belief in first principles requires evidence; (b) Reid held that if such beliefs are to have PES, the following condition must be satisfied:

- (9) the subject has intuitive evidence for the proposition;
- (c) condition (9) is an internal condition; and finally (d) intuitive evidence propels belief only if the subject is aware of it.

5. BELIEF WITHOUT EVIDENCE

There is yet another line of thought in Reid that is relevant to the discussion of internalist and externalist elements in his work. That line of thought can be found in his *Essays on the Active Powers*¹⁵—a work that is virtually neglected in existing interpretations of Reid’s epistemology.¹⁶ In *AP* Reid discusses what he calls the “principles of action,” by which he means “everything that incites us to act.” He distinguishes three sorts of principles: mechanical, animal, and rational. The two main categories of the “mechanical principles” are instincts and habits. In the section on the instincts he says,

Perhaps, not only our actions, but our judgement, and belief, is, in some cases, guided by instinct, that is, by a natural and blind impulse. (*AP* 110)

¹⁵Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* (*AP*).

¹⁶This holds for De Bary, *Thomas Reid and Scepticism*; and Keith Lehrer, *Thomas Reid*. Wolterstorff (*Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*) makes occasional reference to *AP*.

As the context indicates, ‘belief guided by a natural and blind impulse’ is to be understood as “belief without evidence.” In this quote Reid rehearses by now familiar themes—themes that externalists much appreciate: belief is the result of a natural and blind impulse. But, the internalist will urge, mind the qualifications: ‘perhaps’ and ‘in some cases.’ Immediately following the sentences just quoted, Reid continues by making various observations about the relation between belief and evidence.

When we consider man as a rational creature, it may seem right that he should have no belief but what is grounded upon evidence, probable or demonstrative; and it is, I think, commonly taken for granted that it is always evidence, real or apparent, that determines our belief. (*AP* 110)¹⁷

What Reid says that is commonly taken for granted is what we have seen him endorse himself, when he says that “to believe without evidence is a weakness which every man is concerned to avoid” (*EIP* 228). But in the current context he immediately adds,

If this be so, the consequence is, that, in no case, can there be any belief, till we find evidence, or at least, what to our judgement appears to be evidence. I suspect it is not so; but that, on the contrary, before we grow up to the full use of our rational faculties, we do believe, and must believe many things without any evidence at all. ...

If there be any instinctive belief in man, it is probably of the same kind with that which we ascribe to brutes, and may be specifically different from that rational belief which is grounded on evidence; but that there is something in man which we call belief, which is not grounded on evidence, I think, must be granted. ...

Children have every thing to learn; and, in order to learn, they must believe their instructors. They need a greater stock of faith from infancy to twelve or fourteen, than ever after. But how shall they get this stock so necessary to them? If their faith depends upon evidence, the stock of evidence, real or apparent, must bear proportion to their faith. But such, in reality, is their situation, that when their faith must be greatest, the evidence is least. They believe a thousand things before they ever spend a thought upon evidence. Nature supplies the want of evidence, and gives them an instinctive kind of faith without evidence. (*AP* 110–12)

What this passage adds to the portrayal of Reid’s thought on belief and evidence is a developmental perspective. Belief without evidence is a weakness everybody is concerned to avoid, yes—unless one is a child, Reid adds here. Before we learned to use our rational faculties, we had all sorts of belief—“instinctive belief,” as Reid calls it—but when we get older and are properly educated, we aim for “rational belief.” The difference between the two is that whereas rational belief is based on evidence, instinctive belief is not. This distinction resembles Ernest Sosa’s distinction between “animal belief” and “reflective belief.”¹⁸ But there is at least this difference: that whereas for Reid “instinctive belief” is, by implication, “a weakness that everyone is concerned to avoid”—everyone, that is, who has reached the age of discernment—Sosa uses no such pejorative terms.

The internalist, no doubt, will urge that this passage strengthens the claim that Reid’s thinking about PES (i.e. of nonweak belief) has internalist features. For

¹⁷It should be noted that ‘evidence,’ in this quotation, has a strong internalist flavor—it is the sort of thing of which awareness is required if it is to function as evidence for a belief.

¹⁸Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective, A Virtue Epistemology*, 104–5.

“to believe without evidence” (i.e. weak belief) in this passage means “to believe while being unaware of evidence.” Children under twelve, Reid says here, believe without evidence; they hold beliefs “before they ever spend a thought upon evidence.” This indicates that if one *does have* evidence for one’s belief, this involves that one spends thought on the alleged evidence, and thus that one is conscious of a thing’s *being* evidence for one’s belief.

6. CONCLUSION

The task for this paper, I said, was to inquire how the externalist and the internalist strands in Reid’s work relate: are they compatible or incompatible with one another? Now that we have seen what those strands are, that task can be completed. I will do that by summarizing what I have been arguing are Reid’s views on belief, evidence, PES, weakness, and the grounds of belief; and claim that these views are not contradictory and hence that the two strands are compatible.

Beliefs have grounds. Those grounds are either just or not. Just grounds of beliefs are evidence for that belief. Such beliefs have PES.

The relation between sensations and what these signify (i.e. qualities of mind-external objects) is contingent, and belief in the qualities signified is due to our constitution. If these beliefs are to have PES, they require the satisfaction of condition (2), which is an external condition.

There are different kinds of evidence: evidence of the senses, of memory, of consciousness, of testimony, of axioms, of reasoning. This is denied by the skeptics who allow for only one kind of evidence, the evidence of reasoning. The only condition they acknowledge for a belief’s having PES is (1), that is that the subject can back up his beliefs with reasons.

A subject’s belief that *p* is nonweak (has PES) when it is based on evidence of any of the kinds just mentioned, that is when at least one of the conditions (5), (6), (7), (8), (9), or (10) is satisfied. Some of these conditions are internal, that is to say: (5) sometimes is, (6) and (7) always are, and (8), (9), and (10) are internal to varying degrees. Some other conditions are sometimes external: (5) for visual sensations, and to some degree (8).

How do external condition (2) and conditions (5)–(10) relate when it comes to the PES of a belief? We may attribute to Reid the view that a belief has PES when and only when (a) condition (2) is satisfied, and (b) at least one of the conditions (5)–(10) is satisfied. This view is internally consistent, and has the further merit that it is nonskeptical, and can be combined with a developmental perspective according to which, when things go well, humans develop from children, who believe without evidence or consciousness thereof, to adults whose beliefs are well grounded, that is based on evidence—evidence we are often consciously aware of.

The two strands, as was implied in the previous sections, do different jobs in Reid’s overall views, and they have different motivations. The externalist strand wards off skeptical attacks and safeguards the possibility of having beliefs with PES. The internalist strand wards off gratuitous belief (believing on a whim), and urges the grown-up rational person to keep his intellectual house in order. Trust in one’s basic intellectual powers is paired with the urge to base belief on evidence. This, in broad strokes, is what Reid’s views amount to.

Still, the question “Was Thomas Reid an externalist or an internalist?” has no simple answer when one looks at the fine print of his thought. His views are of a hybrid nature—which is not meant as a criticism. To make this point more clearly, let us return to the two sorts of conditions for PES that I have been discussing all along: internal and external. As Bergmann has pointed out, given this distinction the following views about what is required for PES are possible:¹⁹

[a] *Strong internalism with respect to PES*: each of the conditions that are severally necessary and jointly sufficient for that PES is an internal condition;

[b] *Strong externalism with respect to PES*: each of the conditions that are severally necessary and jointly sufficient for that PES is an external condition;

[c] *Weak externalism with respect to PES*: at least one of the conditions that are severally necessary and jointly sufficient for that PES is an external condition;

[d] *Weak internalism with respect to PES*: at least one of the conditions that are severally necessary and jointly sufficient for that PES is an internal condition.

The preceding discussion entails that Reid is not a strong externalist: many beliefs, he holds, require for PES the satisfaction of an internal condition. It also entails that Reid is not a strong internalist either: all beliefs, he holds, require for PES the satisfaction of an external condition. Is Reid then a weak externalist? Yes, he is, as he holds that all beliefs require for PES the satisfaction of external condition (2). At the same time Reid is *almost* a weak internalist. For he holds that very many sorts of belief require for PES the satisfaction of an internal condition, namely one of the conditions (5)–(10); the exceptions are beliefs based on visual sensation, and to some degree some testimonial beliefs. It is best, therefore, to say that Reid’s position is *almost* the conjunction of weak externalism and weak internalism.²⁰

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ABBREVIATIONS

- Adler, Jonathan C. *Belief's Own Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.
- Alston, William P. “Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology.” In *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989: 185–226.
- . “Thomas Reid on Epistemic Principles.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1985): 435–52.
- Bergmann, Michael. “Internalism, Externalism, and the No-Defeater Condition.” *Synthese* 110 (1997): 399–417.
- . *Justification Without Awareness: A Defense of Epistemic Externalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- . “Reidian Externalism.” In *New Waves in Epistemology*, edited by Vincent F. Hendricks and Duncan Pritchard, 52–74. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Coady, C. A. J. “Reid and the Social Operations of the Mind.” In Cuneo and Van Woudenberg, *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, 180–202.
- . *Testimony. A Philosophical Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

¹⁹Here I am indebted again to Bergmann, “Internalism, Externalism, and the No-Defeater Condition.”

²⁰I am grateful to the Center for the Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame for the 2007–2008 Plantinga Fellowship that enabled me to work on this paper. For comments and discussion on various drafts I am indebted to Robert Audi, Martijn Blaauw, Terence Cuneo, Tim Pawl, Alvin Plantinga, Jeroen de Ridder, Patrick Rysiew, Rik Peels, Nicholas Wolterstorff, William Wood, and two anonymous referees for this journal.

- Cuneo, Terence, and René van Woudenberg, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- De Bary, Philip. *Thomas Reid and Scepticism: His Reliabilist Response*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- De Rose, Keith. "Reid's Anti-Sensationalism and his Realism." *Philosophical Review* 98 (1989): 313–48.
- Kroeker, Esther R. "Reid on Natural Signs, Taste, and Moral Perception." In *Reid on Ethics*, edited by Sabine Roeser, 46–66. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Lehrer, Keith. *Thomas Reid*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Nichols, Ryan. *Thomas Reid's Theory of Perception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Plantinga, Alvin. *Warrant: The Current Debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- . *Warrant and Proper Function*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Reid, Thomas. *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*. Edited by Baruch Brody. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969. [AP]
- . *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Edited by Derek R. Brookes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002. [EIP]
- . *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. Edited by Derek R. Brookes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997. [IHM]
- Rysiew, Patrick. "Reidian Evidence." *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 3 (2005): 107–21.
- Sosa, Ernest. *Knowledge in Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- . *A Virtue Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Van Cleve, James. "Thomas Reid on the First Principles of Contingent Truths." *Reid Studies* 3 (1999): 3–30.
- Van Woudenberg, René. "Thomas Reid on Memory and the Identity of Persons." In Cuneo and Van Woudenberg, *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, 204–21.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Wood, Paul. "Thomas Reid and the Culture of Science." In Cuneo and Van Woudenberg, *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, 54–76.