

'Scottish Commonsense' about Memory: A Defence of Thomas Reid's Direct Knowledge Account

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[Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 81:2, June 2003, pp. 229-45.]

ABSTRACT

Reid rejects the image theory - the representative or indirect realist position - that memory-judgments are inferred from or otherwise justified by a present image or introspectible state. He also rejects the trace theory, which regards memories as essentially traces in the brain. In contrast he argues for a direct knowledge account in which personal memory yields unmediated knowledge of the past. He asserts the reliability of memory, not in currently fashionable terms as a reliable belief-forming process, but more elusively as a principle of Commonsense. There is a contemporary consensus against Reid's position. I argue that Reid's critique is essentially sound, and that the consensus is mistaken; personal memory judgments are spontaneous and non-inferential in the same way as perceptual judgments. But I question Reid's account of the connection between personal memory and personal identity. My primary concern is rationally reconstructive rather than scholarly, and downplays recent interpretations of Reid's faculty psychology as a precursor of functionalism and other scientific philosophies of mind.

Thomas Reid's defence of memory as direct knowledge of the past is an original though rather neglected aspect of his Philosophy of Commonsense. In the course of his critique of the Ideal System or Theory of Ideas, he argues against two accounts of memory which treat it as indirect access to the past. The representative or indirect realist position regards remembering as essentially a present experience from which one infers about past events. It says that memory-judgments are inferred from or otherwise justified by a present image, experience or introspectible state known with certainty. I will term this view the image theory. The theory was attractive to empiricists because of its starting-point in present experience; contemporary psychologists, in this respect still surprisingly indebted to empiricism, also frequently assume it. There is a powerful impulse towards the image theory; for instance, we often call the memory-images themselves, and the feelings which accompany them, our 'memories'. It is not a soft target.¹ Reid also rejects the trace theory, which regards memories as essentially traces in the brain - an apparently immovable assumption of contemporary scientific psychology. The two theories co-exist uneasily in Locke, and they remain most influential.

What is distinctive and original about Reid's discussion is that, against the Theory of Ideas, he argues for a direct knowledge account in which personal memory yields unmediated knowledge of the past. He asserts the reliability of memory, not in currently fashionable terms as a reliable belief-forming process, but more elusively as a principle of Commonsense. My conclusion is that Reid's critique is essentially sound, and that the contemporary consensus is wrong. The dialectic of the article runs as follows. Reid's

¹It is defended by Pollock 1987 and Campbell 1994; though Gareth Evans seems to disavow it, it still guides his thinking in 1982, and that of John McDowell at least in his 1997. The issue is discussed further in Hamilton 1998b.

arguments against the image theory, which concerns the justification of individual memory-judgments, are decisive (section 1). It may still be argued that the justification of individual judgments at least presupposes the justification of memory *per se* as reliable, but Reid rightly rejects this idea also (section 2). For him, memory is one of the distinct and original faculties of the mind, whose conceptual and doxastic operations are unique to the power of the faculty. It is an unaccountable feature of our constitution, in two respects: memory is always accompanied by belief, and when distinct, it gives rise to true belief. I argue that the first of these is a conceptual truth, but that the second may be regarded as a principle of Commonsense and thus in Reid's sense unaccountable. His position further involves the rejection of the trace theory (section 3). Finally, there is one important respect in which Reid's treatment of memory goes wrong - in relation to personal identity, where his subscription to substance dualism proves damaging (section 4). Throughout the article, my primary concern is rationally reconstructive rather than scholarly. The aim is to expand on what I see as the truth in Reid's account, downplaying recent interpretations of his faculty psychology as a precursor of functionalism and scientific philosophies of mind.²

It is essential at the outset to emphasise the distinction between personal and merely factual memory of one's past. When Reid discusses 'distinct remembering', and says that 'the evidence we have of our own identity...is grounded on memory, and gives absolute certainty', he is referring to personal or autobiographical memory. This is memory of events which I have witnessed or experienced, where my judgments are not made purely as a result of receiving indications after the event - whether someone else's testimony, or something I have read - that they happened. I can be reminded or prompted, but to describe what happens in this way, is to imply that my judgment is not made simply as a result of being told that something happened. If it was made as a result of being told, this would be purely factual memory of my past - what is also termed habitual memory of information, that which has been learned and not forgotten.³ Although I may on occasion be unsure whether my knowledge of the past comprises personal or merely factual memory, the distinction remains a vital one.

Personal-memory judgments often take the form of ordinary past-tense claims not preceded by the words 'I remember...'; for instance, 'I fell down the steps'. But for such a claim to be considered a personal memory-judgment, the subject must be willing to present it in the form 'I remember falling down the steps...' or 'I remember so-and-so falling down the steps...'. The hallmark shows that personal remembering is not straightforwardly a propositional attitude, and failure to recognise it has resulted in inadequate accounts of both personal memory and personal identity. 'I remember that...' is normally elliptical for 'I remember reading that...', 'I remember being told that...' and so on - the varieties of factual memory. The continuous-verb hallmark implies the possibility of a spontaneous manifestation or willed rehearsal of the remembered events in the form of memory images or experience, often accompanied by feelings of nostalgia, remorse, pleasure or so on. For many writers, such images imply an image theory; I will argue in contrast that they may be the form which my personal memory-knowledge takes.

²For instance Keith Lehrer's claim that 'Reid is a modern cognitive scientist as well as an eighteenth-century metaphysician' [1989: 7].

³As Anscombe calls it in her 1981. The distinction between personal and factual memory, and other aspects of the present treatment, are developed further in Hamilton. forthcoming.

1. 'Memory [has] things which are past...for its objects'

(i) the direct knowledge account

Reid argued, against the Ideal System, that memory is a kind of mental act which cannot be analysed simply in terms of the having of ideas or impressions; it involves judgment that directly concerns a past object. Thus he claims in the Inquiry that '...memory appears to me to have things that are past, and not present ideas, for its objects...I beg leave to think, with the vulgar, that, when I remember the smell of the tuberose, that very sensation which I had yesterday, and which has now no more any existence, is the immediate object of my memory...' [Reid 1997: 2.iii, 28]. In the Essays he argues that 'It is by memory that we have an immediate knowledge of the past' - just as perception offers immediate knowledge of the present - and not indirect knowledge inferred from some present experience [III.i, 253].⁴ Reid holds that 'the remembrance...is a particular act of the mind which now exists, and of which we are conscious', one which it would be absurd to confound - as do proponents of the Ideal System - with 'the thing remembered' [III.i, 253]. The immediate objects of memory are past things and not present ideas - intentional objects, objects of thought or judgment, not objects of awareness. Just as fictional entities such as unicorns can be objects of thought, so can past objects. Hence memory as direct knowledge of the past must involve judgment. Reid's recognition of this explains the great superiority of his account over empiricist rivals, and he argues that 'distinct memory' is always accompanied by a belief in the past existence of that which we remember [III.i, 340]. Talk of 'objects of memory' may remain unclear, however. Another way of saying that memory has past things for its objects - that the smell of the tuberose is the immediate object of my memory - is that my memory-belief is not the result of a process of inference, nor otherwise justified, from a present mental image or introspectible state.

'Direct realism' - supplanting the earlier 'natural realism' - has become accepted as the label for Reid's view, a label applied also to the positions of philosophers as diverse as Samuel Alexander, G.F. Stout and Wittgenstein. But a better description is direct knowledge account. Reid gives short shrift to scepticism, but 'realism' is not necessarily a good label for its antidote. The term 'direct knowledge' also helps to counter a misconception which sees Reid as postulating direct awareness of the past. This misconception renders Reid's vital analogy between memory and perception quite incredible, since it regards him as claiming an awareness of objects that no longer exist - what one might call the 'telescope into the past' view of memory. If there were such a faculty, memory-experience would be akin to hallucination, the seeing of the past as contemporaneous. But when someone is engrossed in their memories, and exclaims 'I can see him now, as if it were yesterday', they do at least think that it is yesterday!⁵ Sir William Hamilton comments in one of the many intrusive footnotes in his Reid edition that 'An immediate knowledge of a past thing is a contradiction' [Reid 1967: 339 - EIP III.i]. But it is 'immediate awareness' that is the contradiction.

⁴All otherwise unqualified Reid references are to Reid 2002, the Edinburgh University Press edition of Essays On The Intellectual Powers.

⁵Compare Wittgenstein: 'Remembering: a seeing into the past. Dreaming might be called that, when it presents the past to us. But not remembering; for, even if it showed scenes with hallucinatory clarity, still it takes remembering to tell us that this is past' [Wittgenstein 1980: 592].

I referred to the analogy between memory and perception as vital to Reid's account. It may be developed in the following way. There is a human capacity spontaneously and reliably to report both past and present events. If asked to describe the view from the window of this room, I will mostly do so spontaneously, though partly via inference. (That square over there must be Red Lion Square, because I remember passing a street-sign with that name on my way here, and so on.) In normal circumstances it would be absurd for someone else to question whether this really is what I am seeing - my judgments in this respect are authoritative, and indeed constitute avowals in the Wittgensteinian sense. It is acceptable for me to misidentify the person walking on the other side of the road, but failure to describe a tree that blocks out much of the view indicates a perceptual or cognitive dysfunction. The reliability of perception is paralleled by that of memory. A spontaneous past-tense claim is one not made simply as a result of receiving indications after the event, whether statements or evidence, that the thing happened, and not based on an inference. The connection with perception is not just an analogy, however. Though with memory there is no possibility of re-focusing in response to questions - at least not in the sense of looking again at the event in question - the object of personal remembering is, I would argue, identical to that of the earlier perception.

The elements of the sequence of impression, sensation and belief involved in the process of perception are easily confounded, Reid believes; in particular, the Ideal System disastrously confuses the conceptual and doxastic operations of the faculty for the impressions and sensations that occasion them. But a recurrent issue of interpretation has been the extent to which Reid really does repudiate the Ideal System. In the case of memory, some commentators have suggested that implicit in his account is a role for the awareness, if not of past objects, then of present memory-impressions. In his treatment of perception Reid has a place for 'sensations', and a common criticism from Thomas Brown onwards has been that these just are 'ideas' - that Reid's diatribe against the Ideal System results only in a new nomenclature. I would argue that for Reid, sensations must be given an adverbial analysis as mental acts. They represent no object, and cannot form the basis for an inference.⁶ However, Reid does not specify the operations of memory in the same detail as those of perception, and does not refer to 'sensations' as such. He has been interpreted as saying that I have an experience or perceive an object by the senses, then later experience a present state of mind which naturally, by an original instinct, suggests or prompts a memory belief about that object. (This is Skorupski's view [1993: 7].) But this interpretation may be incorrect, for as we will now see, Reid holds that remembering consists at least partly in a memory belief.

(ii) the act of remembrance and seeming to remember

The operations of perception 'are easily distinguish'd from all other acts of the mind', as are those of memory, Reid believes. But what is the present 'act of mind' that I experience, which prompts the memory belief, and in what sense is it 'easily distinguish'd' from other mental acts? Some writers have argued that the 'act of mind' is not remembering, but seeming to remember. So when Reid refers to 'what I distinctly remember' he really means 'what I distinctly seem (or seem distinctly) to remember'. (See for instance Skorupski [1993: 7]). This interpretation is prompted by two considerations. First, on the assumption that 'remember' is a factive, the conditional 'If I distinctly remember o-ing, then I o-ed' becomes analytic, and so could hardly be a principle of Commonsense as Reid intends. Second, that unless the act of mind is one of seeming to remember it could not be 'easily distinguish'd' from other

⁶Reid's adverbial account is presented for instance in the Inquiry [1997: VI.xx, 182-3]. Chappell argues that Reid should have dispensed with talk of sensations altogether [1989: 53, 61]; his interpretation is the obverse of those which treat Reid as an indirect realist in disguise. J.-C. Smith in the introduction to his 2000 convincingly defends a middle way.

mental acts.

The second consideration is mistaken, I will argue. The first has some justification, but its conclusion is mistaken. It is not clear that 'If I distinctly remember o-ing, then I o-ed' is analytic. This is because although 'remember' is a factive, 'distinctly remembers o-ing' seems not to be. 'I distinctly remember locking the front door, but I can't have done' is paradoxical - an expression of puzzlement - but not unintelligible. 'I distinctly remember...' functions both as a claim of certainty and as a justification that may, on rare occasions, be defeated.⁷ The puzzlement expressed by 'I distinctly remember...but I can't have done' arises in the unusual situation where a distinct memory seems to be mistaken. It would be wrong to formalise this puzzlement by means of the expression 'I seem distinctly to remember', let alone by 'I distinctly seem to remember', which is not intelligible at all. On Reid's account it is remembering which is basic, not seeming to remember. Here we see the close connection between Reid's account of the act of remembering, and his assertion of its reliability, of which more below.

The second motive for claiming that 'seems to remember' is the act of mind in question follows directly from the image theory. Unabashed proponents of the theory such as Pollock argue that only putative memories are introspectively distinguishable. Acknowledging that many philosophers have denied that there is a state of 'seeming to remember', he argues that 'memory must provide us with beliefs about what we 'seem to remember' and then we infer the truth of what are ordinarily regarded as memory beliefs from these apparent memories'. Pollock maintains that we can distinguish, by introspection, beliefs that we have on the basis of memory from those that we have on the basis of perception, 'or for no reason at all'. Or rather, we can distinguish putative memory-beliefs from other kinds: 'I do not mean that we can tell introspectively whether we are correctly remembering what we take ourselves to be remembering' [Pollock 1987: 51-2]. The idea seems to be that there is an occurrent state of mind - what Reid calls 'remembrance' - which is introspectibly tagged as such.

Pollock's qualification is clearly necessary - image theorists must avoid the absurd claim that memory yields infallible knowledge of the past. They must rather say: Although I cannot be sure whether the event happened or not, I can at least be sure that if it happened, I know that it did on the basis of memory rather than because I received indications after the event. Clearly this is not the case, however. I can certainly wonder 'I o-ed, but I'm not sure whether I genuinely remember o-ing or was told that I had o-ed'. Only with regard to recent events does this doubt make no sense. If someone says, about having a headache earlier the same day, 'I don't know if I remember this, or if I was told it', extraordinary circumstances would be needed by way of explanation, but in other cases it may be perfectly intelligible. Thus there is no introspectible state of 'seeming to remember'. There are two kinds of 'apparent memory': 'I'm not sure whether I o-ed' - maybe nothing of the sort happened - and 'I o-ed, but I'm not sure whether I genuinely remember o-ing or was told that I had o-ed'. Does the existence of the second doubt undermine my earlier claim that 'I seem to remember...' usually functions as a tentative assertion about the past, and never as a report of an introspectible state? I do not think so. Certainly I am unlikely to be confident that I know that something happened if I am not sure whether I witnessed it, or learned of it in some other way. 'I seem to remember o-ing' - the second kind of case - is a claim that is tentative about the source of evidence, and again not a report of an introspectible state. 'I seem to remember...' is always motivated by a doubt - and the kind of doubt must be specifiable.

⁷The way in which personal memory may be overridden by other sources of knowledge is misunderstood by the 'narrative conception' of memory popular among psychologists, an issue discussed in Hamilton 1998b.

If Reid's claim that remembering is 'easily distinguish'd' from other mental acts amounts to the claim that I know for sure that I at least seem to remember, then it would be mistaken in the same way as the image theory. Thomas Brown's criticism mentioned earlier, that Reid's 'sensations' just are 'ideas', would then receive some vindication. That criticism does indeed seem valid in the context of Reid's discussion of personal identity, as I will argue below. But in the present discussion he seems to be making a different claim: that personal remembering is primitive and irreducible, and so is easily distinguished in our philosophical reflections from other mental operations. This interpretation is supported by his contrast in the same paragraph with the operations of perception, which are hard to disjoin 'in our conceptions' - that is, in our philosophical reflections.

(iii) distinct memory and belief

To understand the 'state of mind' which Reid postulates, it is necessary to look more closely at his discussion of distinct memory and belief. Reid is explicit that memory involves judgment and thus belief.

In the Inquiry he comments that 'the sensation compels my belief of the present existence of the smell [of the rose], and memory my belief of its past existence' [Reid 1997: 2.iii, 29]. In the Essays he writes that 'in mature years, and in a sound state of mind, every man feels that he must believe what he distinctly remembers, though he can give no other reason of his belief, but that he remembers the thing distinctly; whereas, when he merely imagines a thing ever so distinctly, he has no belief of it upon that account'. Reid then contrasts distinct memory with cases where memory is 'less distinct and determinate, and where [the subject] is ready to allow it may have failed him' [III.i, 254]. He gives no explicit gloss of 'distinctly remembers', but when discussing perception, he says that we see things more distinctly when they are close, in good light, and so on [II.v, 96-7]. Certainly it makes sense to say that a distinct original perception is required for distinct memory. Thus to allay neurotic anxieties when going on holiday, the present writer makes sure to get a distinct perception of locking the front door, to fix it in his memory that he has done so. Perhaps a distinct original perception is all that is required for distinct remembering. 'I distinctly saw it, and what is more I now distinctly remember what I distinctly saw' seems pleonastic. It is true that one can distinctly see something, and in the course of time forget about it. But nothing is added to the force of 'I distinctly saw' by saying 'and I distinctly remember'.

Reid comes close to asserting a conceptual connection between remembering - or distinct remembering - and belief. But it might be argued that to establish this connection, he would have done better to avoid talking of an act of mind of which one is 'conscious'. He could then have glossed 'distinctly remembers' as: is inclined confidently and spontaneously to assert a past-tense claim, in that grammatical form distinctive of personal memory, and is able to give supporting detail in that form. 'Spontaneous' means: not made simply as a result of receiving indications after the event, whether statements or evidence, that the thing happened, and not based on an inference. On this account, the connection between 'distinctly remembers o-ing' and 'believes that she o-ed' - between distinct memory and belief - is clearly a conceptual one. This is less clear in Reid's discussion, when he says that it is an unaccountable feature of our constitution, that distinct memory is always accompanied by belief. (Or perhaps one should say 'almost always'; as noted earlier, the co-existence of distinct memory with grounds for doubt causes puzzlement in the subject.)

The suggested gloss on 'distinctly remembers', and the rejection of an introspectible state of seeming to remember, should not be equated with a rejection of memory-experience. Although Reid himself has little to say on the matter, direct knowledge theorists have generally been hostile to memory-experience. The view of Stout, Wittgenstein, Anscombe and others seems to be that one's images are themselves assessed for correctness by memory, not vice versa.⁸ These writers fail to recognise that when people

⁸For instance Stout 1930. Arthur Collins for instance writes that 'if there is a memory-image, its features count as

refer to their 'memories' of someone, or of some event, a memory-image may be the form that their knowledge of the past takes - a formulation favoured by Mounce [1994]. This claim is not inconsistent with the Reidian idea that judgment is central to memory, and offers a middle way between an image theory and Rylean reduction of image-talk. (A more recent representative of the latter is Dennett [1981].)

A spontaneous image implies the possibility of a judgment. But this does not mean that, in the case of distinct memories, images are accompanied by the conviction that the event happened. Rather, the claim is negative: It does not occur to the subject to doubt the correctness of such images. In the case of flashbacks had by trauma victims, or other less dramatic but still spontaneous memory-images, there is no need for the subject additionally to judge: 'And this is how it happened'. Where personal memory can be said to have a phenomenology, it does not admit of analysis into two separable components, image and judgment.

It may be argued that to have a memory-image is simply to conceive of the past object, and that any stronger claim involves postulating static objects of internal perception or introspection - a profoundly unReidian position.⁹ In response, I would argue that when I have memory-images of my latest minor car accident, there is an experiential quality absent from simply 'thinking about the crash'; though such images should not be regarded as objects of internal perception. But the issue is a deeply problematic one on which much more needs to be said. However, it should be understood that an excessively rationalistic approach in philosophical discussion of memory results from failure properly to acknowledge the role of images and feelings. If someone says 'My memories of him are a comfort', they are not referring to the truths which they know on the basis of witnessing, etc. Fundamentally, personal memory is retained knowledge of the past. But as narrative models emphasise - or over-emphasise - memories are not a static body of information, since their meaning changes according to one's present situation or knowledge. Personal memory also generates or sustains self-identity - the subject's conception of the person they are. Perhaps because of this, misrememberings may still be regarded as memories - as when we say 'your memories of these events are getting hazy'. But none of these considerations implies an image theory.

Reid is concerned to undermine the image theory's account of the justification of individual memory-reports. How then are such reports justified? 'I was there, I witnessed it' makes explicit the basis on which the past-tense judgment was made. This is not a justification independent of memory, of course, since it is itself a personal memory-claim. Once it is accepted that the past-tense claim is a putative memory-report, it may be justified in many different ways - by appeal to the reports of other witnesses, and to material evidence. ('There was a small earthquake here last night?' 'How do you know?' 'I was here, I felt it'. 'But how do you know it was an earthquake?') Where the subject claims a distinct memory, however, these will be justifications for the audience, not for the subject. To use currently prevalent but unhelpful terminology, such justifications are externalist in the sense of 'not appealing to an introspectible or inner state', but internalist in the sense of 'within the sphere of reasons'. But surely memory itself can be justified as reliable? An externalist account of the justification of memory-reports claims that memory is a reliable belief-forming process. There are many things wrong with this claim. Memory might be better-described as a 'belief-retaining' than as a 'belief-forming process. Most fundamentally, however, the attempt to justify memory as reliable is misconceived, as that Reid well understood. It is to his treatment of this elusive issue that I now turn.

things that I remember only if I judge that the past I experienced was as the image is' (Collins 1997: 79).

⁹This objection was made to me by J-C Smith.

2. 'Those things really did happen which I distinctly remember'

Reid postulated as one of his twelve principles of contingent but self-evident truth that 'Those things really did happen which I distinctly remember', arguing that '[the] belief, which we have from distinct memory, we account real knowledge, no less certain than if it was grounded on demonstration' [VI.v, 474; III.i, 254]. Such beliefs, Reid maintains, are irresistible, and our confidence in them cannot be explained as based on experience. His formulation of principles of Commonsense may be regarded as a legitimation of everyday beliefs in the face of Humean scepticism. But in the case of perception, memory and so on, the belief is not legitimated by showing that the faculty in question is reliable.

If there are principles of normative epistemology, something like Reid's memory-principle must be one of them. Those who claim that he greatly overstates the reliability of memory are mistaken. I have a distinct memory of moving to my present home on an exceptionally mild winter's day, and arriving at my house to find the removal van already there. These are distinct memories, which I could elaborate with further detail, as well as information based on inference - for instance the year in question. Some of that detail - the colour of the removal van, how sunny it was that day - is less distinct and may be inaccurate, but I find it inconceivable that the distinct memories as stated could turn out incorrect. As it stands, however, Reid's principle is too strong. It should be re-formulated as a denial of completely-false memories: 'Those things which I distinctly remember are at worst "false-in-detail"'. That, I would argue, is what the reliability of memory amounts to. 'Completely-false' implies that nothing like the events reported ever happened. ('Completely-false memory' is short for 'Sincere, attentive but completely-false memory-claim'.) Such memories are necessarily rare. Where memories are mistaken, they are almost invariably false-in-detail - in ordinary language, mis-rememberings. The contrast between false-in-detail and completely false memories has been neglected, and it helps to clarify recent debate over False Memory Syndrome.

In his discussion of False Memory, Ian Hacking contrasts an alleged mis-remembering - a patient recalls being abused by her uncle when in fact it was her father who was the abuser - with a 'completely-false' memory of the same event, where no abuse of any kind happened. [Hacking 1995: 258-9; he refers to the two cases as 'contrary' and 'merely false'] But misidentification of the perpetrator is surely too significant to count as a mis-remembering. Even if it is imprecise and context-dependent, however, the contrast between false-in-detail and completely-false is a vital one - as it is also in the case of perception. The claim that mistaken memory-claims are normally merely false-in-detail is not one to be asserted on the basis of psychological research. Rather, this is how claims such as 'Your memory is mistaken' or 'Your memory deceives you' are understood. If the subject is assumed to be sincere, we are inclined to think that their memory-report is at worst false-in-detail. That, to reiterate, is what the reliability of memory amounts to. Certainly it can happen that what I think I remember, turns out to be something I dreamt vividly, or saw in a film, or was told. This would be a case of 'completely-false' memory, but it is rare, and special circumstances are needed to explain it. Someone who regularly confuses what they have seen in a film with what they have witnessed in real life is displaying not forgetfulness, but some kind of cognitive disorder.

Earlier I contrasted memory, 'apparent memory' in its two senses, and imagination. The varieties of past-tense statements purporting to concern a witnessed event may now be demarcated more precisely. If true, the statement may be a personal memory-judgment, or a judgment based on testimony or some other way of learning about the event after it occurred. If false, it may be based on testimony and completely false, or false-in-detail; or it may be a mis-remembering or false-in-detail memory; or it may, on rare occasions,

be a completely false memory. This completes the gloss on the re-formulated principle of Commonsense, 'Those things which I distinctly remember are at worst "false-in-detail"'.

Now for the question of whether such a principle can be justified. Many psychologists, and some philosophers, seem to believe that an empirical justification is possible. Alvin Goldman writes: 'Memory can certainly yield mistakes. The question is: How pervasive is the unreliability of memory, and what specific mechanisms account for such unreliability?' Psychologist James McClelland argues that memory is constructive - that is, reconstructive - and that this 'has profound implications for the question of the veridicality of memory and the extent to which it may be influenced by suggestion, preexisting knowledge, and other related experiences' [Goldman 1986: 208, 183; McClelland 1995: 69]. In contrast to these writers, Reid would maintain - rightly in my view - that the reliability of memory could not be justified empirically. He regards the so-called track-record argument for the reliability of memory as viciously circular, since it depends on that reliability in its very construction: 'Every kind of reasoning for the veracity of our faculties, amounts to no more than taking their own testimony for their veracity' [VI.v: 481]. Proponents of the track-record argument may urge that, when using memory to arrive at the conclusion that memory is reliable, one does not make claims about the reliability of memory; but there remains an effective circularity. (As illustrated for instance by Audi [1998: 224-9], and Pollock [1987: 114-122].)

Reid had a deeper reason for rejecting an empirical justification of memory's reliability, however, for he maintains that the question 'How reliable is memory?' cannot sensibly be posed. This, I would argue, brings him into conflict with reliabilism, a position with which some writers have wanted to associate him.¹⁰ But contrasting Reid's view with reliabilism requires some care. The latter position is externalist, defining knowledge as true belief acquired by a reliable method, whether or not that method can be known to be reliable; hence their claim is a conditional one, viz. if it constitutes a reliable belief-forming process, then memory yields knowledge. Reid's rejection of an empirical justification of the reliability of memory therefore cuts no ice with reliabilists. However, they must at least maintain that 'Memory is a reliable belief-forming process' is an empirical claim, and here Reid's elusive remarks offer the beginnings of a critique. Reid is not a reliabilist, I will argue, because he does not believe that the reliability of memory has empirical status. This is shown by his separate claim that the track-record argument is not only circular, but also inefficacious.

Reid's claim occurs in the context of his discussion of memory as an 'original faculty' whose reliability is 'unaccountable'. He continues: 'When I believe that I washed my hands and face this morning, there appears no necessity in the truth of the proposition...How then do I come to believe it? I remember it distinctly. This is all I can say. This remembrance is an act of my mind. Is it possible that this act should be, if the event had not happened?...[Unless a necessary connection between them can be shown,] that belief is unaccountable, and we can say no more but that it is the result of our constitution' [III.ii, 256]. If there is no necessary connection between the distinct remembering and the event, could there be an empirical justification of the reliability of memory? 'Perhaps it may be said, that the experience we have had of the fidelity of memory is a good reason for relying upon its testimony. I deny not that this may be a reason to those who have had this experience, and who reflect upon it. But...[it] must be some very rare occasion that leads a man to have recourse to it; and in those who have done so, the testimony of memory

¹⁰For instance Woudenberg 1999, Baumann 1999, and De Bary 2002, which appeared too recently for justice to be done to its arguments here. Van Cleve 1999 is, I think, mistaken in claiming that Reid's comments here leave space for a track-record argument.

was believed before the experience of its fidelity, and that belief could not be caused by the experience which came after it' [III.ii, 256]. Reid's claim here is not that the reliability of memory cannot be justified empirically without circularity; rather, that our trust in memory could not be caused by experience of its reliability.

It may be felt that Reid's claim differs only in emphasis from Hume's, in that he simply describes our 'original' instincts; note his statement that the 'belief which we have of what we remember [is] unaccountable, and we can say no more but that it is the result of our constitution', which is the will of our Maker. Thus we are psychologically impelled to accept the deliverances of memory. Thomas Brown indeed suggests that Reid and Hume disagree only in the emphasis which they put on the respective unjustifiability and unavoidability of the principles of Commonsense: 'the sceptic pronounces the first [unjustifiability] in a loud tone of voice, and the second [unavoidability] in a whisper, while his supposed antagonist passes rapidly over the first and dwells on the second with a tone of confidence' [Brown 1846: II, 89]. Brown's comment shows, I think, why Reid is sometimes held to be a reliabilist - because it is felt that otherwise, his position cannot be distinguished from Hume's, who is clearly not a reliabilist. At the root of Reid's reliabilism, on this view, is his Providential theism.

Clearly Brown is right to discern a structural similarity between Hume and Reid. But they nonetheless inhabit strikingly different philosophical worlds, in a way that the reliabilist interpretation of Reid does insufficient justice. Indeed one should resist Alston's view that, for Reid, the 'only (noncircular) basis we have for trusting [memory and other sources of belief] is that they are firmly established doxastic processes, so firmly established that we cannot help [trusting them]...'. This is not a 'basis'.¹¹ The reliabilist interpretation makes Reid's position comparatively uninteresting, and misses the subtlety - or at least the elusiveness - of the normative dimension to his discussion. Reid maintains that, since the reliability of memory is never seriously doubted, any purported empirical justification is a charade - a symptom of the insanity of the Ideal System. That the reliability of memory is never seriously doubted is, moreover, a normative claim - meaning 'is never seriously doubted by a well-ordered practical intelligence'. (The phrase is from Gordon Graham [1998: 206]; see also Skorupski [1993: 11-14].) Reid here anticipates Wittgenstein in refusing to engage with the sceptic. To say that a question makes no sense in ordinary discourse is not just to describe original instincts or linguistic practices. It is to say that the sceptical question has not been given a context in which it is really intelligible; hence its denial cannot take the form of a straightforward empirical claim as reliabilists assume.

Henry Sidgwick's treatment shows how these claims may be developed into a critique of reliabilism. Sidgwick, like Reid, suggests that the philosophical doubt is inconsistent with other, ordinary, beliefs held by its proponents [Sidgwick 1905: 415]. But although much-influenced by Scottish Commonsense, there is also a Kantian strain in Sidgwick's work, shown by his explicit claim that the reliability of memory is a presupposition of human enquiry. To obtain scientific or historical knowledge, he argued, 'we must assume the general trustworthiness of memory, and the general trustworthiness of testimony under proper limitations and conditions...' [Sidgwick 1882: 542-3]. Sidgwick's tone is more transcendentalist, in its claim of necessary conditions of knowledge; Reid for instance says that we might have been so constituted that we had immediate knowledge of the future rather than the past, and that this would have been no more 'unaccountable', although 'much more inconvenient' [III.ii, 258] - though this may be an example of his dry humour. But like Sidgwick, Reid is not a reliabilist because he does not believe that it could be a matter of empirical fact that memory is a reliable belief-forming process. The pursuit of these

¹¹Alston 1993 p. 127; Sosa is right to reply that such an argument would be just as circular as a track-record argument [1994: 278-9].

issues takes us to the core of the interpretation of Reid's Philosophy of Common Sense, and suggest that its principles should be treated as basic presumptions which we must take for granted, rather than as self-evident principles which form a basis for our beliefs.¹²

3. 'Memory is an original faculty...of which we can give no account, but that we are so made'

Reid claims two principles as 'unaccountable': that memory, or strictly, conception in memory, is always accompanied by belief; and that, when distinct, it gives rise to true belief. (A point made by Woudenberg [1999]). The first claim appears in the Inquiry: 'Why sensation should compel our belief of the present existence of a thing, memory a belief of its past existence, and imagination no belief at all, I believe no philosopher can give a shadow of reason, but that such is the nature of these operations; they are all simple and original, and therefore inexplicable acts of the mind' [Reid 1997: 2.iii, 28]. I have argued that it is a conceptual truth, rather than an unaccountable feature of our constitution, that distinct memory is always accompanied by belief. In contrast, it is plausible to regard the second principle, that distinct memories are true, as a principle of Commonsense and thus 'unaccountable'. For Reid, there is no ultimate explanation of such facts or alleged facts, other than that God or Nature has so arranged our faculties. His teleological conception of the constitutive properties of mind contrasts with Hume's causal conception; the substance dualism that underlies it is now deeply unpopular. Reid has a more extensive category of the unambiguously mental, with a more consistent demarcation from the physical, than Descartes. In the Meditations Descartes rejected the view that I am lodged in my body like a pilot in a vessel. For Reid however, that description is correct; the body is the instrument of the mind. Despite attempts to portray Reid as a precursor of cognitive science, he rejected a 'science of the mind', rejecting the possibility of an explanation of the relations between matter and mind.¹³

In most of these general respects Reid's account is clearly no longer viable - although for some contemporary sympathisers of Reid, evolutionary theory, though not an absolute stopping-place, may take the place of Divine Providence. But his claim that the ability to remember is primitive and unaccountable remains defensible, and is not in itself anti-scientific. It means various things: Memory is not analysable in terms of the more basic capacities of imaging and inductive inference, as the image theory says; its reliability is not susceptible to empirical justification, as reliabilists claim; and memory-judgments are not a causal consequence of neural processes or states which constitute the essence of memory, as the trace theory maintains. This last issue I will now examine.

Reid's rejection of the memory-trace model or trace theory is, I would argue, consistent with the

¹²The contrast is found in Wolterstorff 2001, and commented on persuasively in Brun-Rovet 2002 and Pakaluk 2002.

¹³Edward Reid in his 1997 - a humanistic critique of scientific psychology - argues that Reid advocated "a descriptive psychology, to elucidate the modes of this adaptation of the self to world [contrived by the Deity], but denied even the possibility of an experimental, causally based psychological science" [1997: 27; also 13, 23-6, 28].

preservation of scientific psychology. Thus I disagree with the recent claim that Reid's opposition to memory-traces was achieved at the cost of 'dropping the idea of explanation [of memory] and buying into non-physical souls and truly originary free will'.¹⁴ There are many important questions about memory which psychologists could continue to investigate without presupposing a trace theory, such as: optimum conditions of recall, and how subsequent suggestion causes inaccuracies; learning tasks that can be performed by amnesiacs; localisation of brain function governing different recognitional capacities. The trace-concept is, I would argue, an illegitimate extension of the concept of localised brain-function which has been central to the development of the brain sciences and remains almost an article of faith within them. Localisation concerns particular capacities such as recognition or memory. Because these clearly are capacities, there is less likely to be a misunderstanding about what imputing localised function means, viz. simply this: that if there is damage to a certain area of the brain, that function will be impaired. Neural processes are not the essence of facial recognition, for instance, but its causal condition. In fact, localised brain-function is not as well-founded as many psychologists suppose - once plasticity is admitted, claims of localisation look empty - but the idea of a localised trace is even more dubious.

The beginnings of a critique of the trace theory are found in Reid's discussion, though this are laconic even by his own standards. His main target is Locke, whose account has elements of both image and trace theories, with some resulting incoherence. Locke postulated a faculty that discerns similarity between past and present ideas, and Reid responds that a memory faculty which had separate access to past ideas would make the present idea redundant [III.vii, 353, 355-6]. Reid is scathing about 'images in the brain', regarding them as part of the Ideal System's attempt to account for the unaccountable. He argues that although the brain 'has been dissected times innumerable by the nicest anatomists' it has proved impossible to find 'any vestige of an image of any external object'. This is not surprising, for the brain is 'the most improper substance that can be imagined for receiving or retaining images, being a soft, moist, medullary substance' [II.iv, 93]. If this is sarcasm, there is a serious philosophical point behind it. Traces surely have to be 'structural analogues' - in some sense, images - of events remembered, and Reid is right in claiming that the brain is not the right kind of thing to receive such impressions.¹⁵

It may be objected that such arguments against traces are now redundant, since psychologists reject localised in favour of distributed traces. Proponents of connectionism espouse a holistic position which maintains that information is 'evoked' or stored everywhere in the brain. Although such concepts are nebulous, they still imply a structural analogue, otherwise the connectionist claim would be as anodyne as Reid's acknowledgment that 'memory is dependent on some proper state or temperament of the brain' [III.vii, 282]. Thus Reid's view that memory is unaccountable forms the basis for a continuing critique of the latest trace theories. Such a critique would insist that information is essentially a personal, not a sub-personal or impersonal concept, and so 'total neural activity' cannot constitute memory-information as proponents of distributed traces envisage. Relatedly, the psychological model of encoding, storage and retrieval is non-explanatory, since information-retention and remembering are interdefined concepts. The basic sense of information-retention is retention by a person, not by a brain - that is, remembering. Connectionism may suggest ways of theorising about the mechanisms of memory, but not of capturing its essence.¹⁶

¹⁴ 'Modern critics must either take on [the latter package], or find an alternative theory to do the jobs which God, soul, and free will once did' [Sutton 1998: 261].

¹⁵ On the neglected issue of why traces have to be structural analogues, see Squires [1969: 193-4].

¹⁶ Space does not permit development of these claims here;

4. 'The evidence we have of our own identity...is grounded on memory, and gives absolute certainty'

In the period between the decline of the Scottish Commonsense school and his recent induction into the canon of major philosophers, Reid was probably best-known for his objections to Locke's account of personal identity. His deepest criticism, shared with Butler, is that memory presupposes personal identity and so cannot ground it; on Locke's criterion, he argues, 'personal identity is confounded with the evidence which we have of our personal identity' [III.vi, 277]. I have argued elsewhere that this criticism ignores the possibility that memory and personal identity form a conceptual holism - a possibility which J.S. Mill recognised when he wrote that 'the phenomenon of Self and that of Memory are merely two sides of the same fact'. (Despite Mill's hostility to the 'school of intuition' which Reid represented, to a surprising extent he followed a Reidian agenda.)¹⁷

Here I wish to examine Reid's central positive claim that 'the proper evidence [of a permanent self] is remembrance... The evidence we have of our own identity, as far back as we remember, is totally of a different kind from the evidence we have of the identity of other persons, or of objects of sense. The first is grounded on memory, and gives absolute certainty' [III.iv, 264-6]. This claim becomes one of the twelve first principles of contingent truth: we know immediately 'our own personal identity and continued existence, as far back as we remember anything distinctly' [VI.v, 476]. Reid's claim expresses an interesting measure of agreement with Locke. It is, however, an incautious one. As argued earlier, the subject does not have infallible knowledge of their identity over time, since there is no introspectible state known with certainty and common to all cases of at least apparent memory. The claim of authoritative access to one's past actions and experiences is not without foundation, however. Earlier it was claimed that personal memory is a way of knowing about others, in that its characteristic forms are 'I remember X o-ing' as well as 'I remember o-ing'. But only in the latter case - where it concerns oneself - does personal memory involve a distinctively self-conscious way of knowing. That is, it is not a way in which I could know about someone else.

This distinctively self-conscious way of knowing is manifested in a phenomenon quite close to Reid's certain knowledge of our identity through memory, viz. immunity to error through misidentification (IEM). Consider the claim 'I remember swallowing a ball-bearing when I was a young child'. If, for whatever reason, I come to doubt that this did happen to me, it will make no sense for me to continue to maintain, using the same justification, that nonetheless, someone swallowed a ball-bearing. That is, I cannot say 'Well, I distinctly remember someone swallowing it'. (Note the importance of the continuous-verb formulation.) When the claim is based on testimony, however - when it constitutes merely factual

the issue is pursued at greater length in Hamilton forthcoming.

¹⁷[J.S. Mill 1989: 212-13]; Mill's view was discussed further in Hamilton 1998a. The interpretation of Locke as offering a memory criterion was greatly influenced by Reid's presentation of his account; that interpretation is persuasively criticised in Southgate [2000].

memory of my past - the corresponding retreat claim does make sense.¹⁸

Thus although Reid was wrong to hold that personal memory gives infallible knowledge of one's identity, it does yield unique knowledge. Personal memory is a distinctively self-conscious way of knowing about oneself, and is integral to self-consciousness. IEM thus constitutes a special feature of personal as opposed to factual memory-judgments. Its existence shows that sympathisers of Reid are misguided when, out of a concern that it sustains the image theory, they seek to undermine the distinction between personal and factual memory. One example is Roger Squires, who rejects the idea that personal memory is a 'special or strict sort of memory', claiming instead that all remembering is essentially the retention of knowledge or information. He is right that personal remembering is not introspectively distinguishable as the image theory maintains, but wrong to elide it so closely with factual memory.¹⁹ Others have argued that the continuous-verb locution fits cases of recollection or recall, but not other examples of personal memory, while Malcolm defines perceptual memory - associated with images - as a sub-category of personal memory, one which does not necessarily involve mental imagery. But the lack of a continuous-verb description, or of any supporting detail, must surely make the subject wonder whether they really remember the event at all, or were simply told that it had happened.²⁰

Although in respect of its relation to personal identity, Reid's account of memory is flawed, it remains original and historically important. In emphasising that memory involves belief and hence judgment, he was the first to transcend the impoverished account offered by the theory of ideas, in which respect there are parallels with Kant. Although his discussion is compressed, Reid's caution on psychological theorising about the reliability and operations of memory is of enduring value. He thought more deeply about memory than many of his successors who have been more widely discussed.²¹

¹⁸These claims, and the conceptual holism of memory and personal identity, are defended in Hamilton 1995 and forthcoming.

¹⁹He claims that what is special is the witnessing rather than the type of remembering - the detail of the witness's description is more open-ended, while non-witnesses can give only circumscribed reports dependent on information imparted to them [Squires 1969].

²⁰Malcolm thinks it makes sense to say: 'I remember [my grandfather] well. He always wore his Confederate uniform, chewed tobacco, and told jokes; but I can't any longer see him in my mind as I formerly could'. But then, surely, I do not remember him well - my memory is more factual than personal [Malcolm 1963: 221].

²¹I am grateful for comments from Peter Baumann, Robin Hendry, E.J. Lowe, David Papineau, Roger Squires, John Skorupski, and especially John-Christian Smith, whose patient responses have saved me from several errors of interpretation; and from the anonymous referees of this journal.

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