

Reid's Philosophy of Religion

I. INTRODUCTION

Thomas Reid was a Christian philosopher. He never wavered from his theism or Christian belief, and a temperate, sincere faith pervades his writing and his biography. Apparently orthodox in belief,¹ he wasn't given to theological and ecclesiastical controversies, but he did have a life-long interest in what we now call philosophy of religion issues. From 1751 to 1780 Reid's lectures included the subject of natural theology, what can be known about God apart from revelation. Reid's notes for these lectures are almost entirely lost, but several student transcriptions from his lectures at Glasgow University (1763-1780) survive.²

¹"Orthodox", that is, in a broad sense. He was quite out of step with the Calvinism of 18th century Scotland. (W: 40b, 41b, 52b)

²I use the following abbreviations for the student transcriptions, citing original page numbers except where noted.

1780: Baird, George. "Notes from the Lectures of Dr. Thomas Reid", MS A104929, 8 vol., Mitchell Library, Glasgow. I have used my own transcriptions of this, but I also give the page numbers for the Duncan 1981 edition using the abbreviation LNT. At lecture number 86 (LNT: 123f) the pagination restarts with a change of volume. Quotations are made by the permission of Enda Ryan, Senior Librarian of Archives and Special Collections, Mitchell Library.

1775: Jack, Robert. "Dr. Reid's Lectures", MS Gen 117, Glasgow University Library. As this manuscript is not paginated, I cite it by lecture number. Quotations are made by permission of the Special Collections Department, Glasgow University Library.

1769: Anonymous. "Notes of Thomas Reid's lectures on pneumatology, 1769", MS Gen 760, Glasgow University Library. Quotations are made by permission of the Special Collections Department, Glasgow University Library.

1768: Anonymous. "Dr. Reid's Lectures", New College Library, University of Edinburgh. Quotations made by permission of the New College Library, University of Edinburgh.

1766: Anonymous. "Reid's Essays" [Student notes on pneumatology, natural theology, moral and political

Reid is a unique anti-medieval early modern theist, perhaps the last great Newtonian theist. An admirer of Samuel Clarke and Joseph Butler, he combines the rationalistic apologetics of the early eighteenth century with an anti-speculative bent and a keen eye for human psychology. He doesn't hesitate to employ the tools of philosophy in matters of religion. We shouldn't, he says, be led by "zeal for religion" to defame reason in a rush to exalt revelation (EAP IV.xi: 636a). In this way Calvinism and Bayle, he saw, paved the way for Hume and other critics of religion.³ Although he continually emphasizes the limits of human understanding, Reid insists that "Revelation was not intended to supersede, but to aid the use of our natural faculties" (EAP V.ii: 641b).

Reid's lectures follow an ancient pattern, treating the existence, attributes, and works of God.⁴ Shortly we'll explore some of the more interesting contents of Reid's lectures: arguments for theism (section II), God and epistemology (III), our knowledge of divine attributes (IV), and the problem of evil (V). One comes to Reid hoping to see him wrestle with Hume's carefully crafted attack on religious theism in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. One searches in vain for a reference to this in Reid's published works, though it gets a brief mention in his lectures. It seems Reid dismissed it

philosophy] 1766-1767, Aberdeen University Library MS 2131/8/VII. Quotations made by permission of Dr. Iain Beavan, Senior Curator, Special Libraries and Archives, Historic Collections, Aberdeen University.

Some of these were jotted down (at times in shorthand) as Reid slowly read his lectures. Others were re-expanded from shorthand versions some time after being written. As a reminder of the low quality of this material compared to Reid's published writings and manuscripts in his own hand, I have not corrected spelling or punctuation, though I have silently expanded common abbreviations, replaced certain eighteenth century conventions (such as using "M^r" for "Mr."), and occasionally inserted a word in brackets for clarity.

³Stewart 2002b: section 2, EAP IV.xi: 636a, Popkin 1965: xxii-xxxii, Bayle, *Dictionary*: Clarifications I-III, 395-435.

⁴Reid says he has taken this idea from Francis Hutcheson's *Synopsis Metaphysicae* (1744), which he recommends to his students. (1780: 19; LNT: 2, 1775: lect. 55, 1769: 49, 1766: 60-61) This sort of sequence goes back to the Stoics. (Cicero, *Nature*: Bk. II, esp. 47-48)

as old news, a mere re-run of Hobbes' and Bolingbroke's watery theism, that there is a creator of the world but that "we know nothing of his moral attributes or the principles of his actions" (1780: 158; LNT: 95). We can guess that Reid acknowledged the subtlety and philosophical depth of the work (as he did with Hume's other philosophical productions), but he apparently considered it too off-track, too wrong-headed to demand his full attention.⁵ Happily, he does wrestle at length with section XI of Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Reid ignores the celebrated section X "Of Miracles" in his natural religion lectures,⁶ but replies to some of what Hume says about miracles in his logic lectures.⁷

Why didn't Reid work this lecture material into a book on natural theology? I suggest four reasons.⁸ First, as we'll see, much of this material found its way into Reid's two final books. (EIP, EAP) Second, Reid knew he didn't have a critical mass of original, careful philosophical material here.⁹ Third, in Reid's eyes, the real danger to theism is from bad epistemology (IHM 3-4); once one gets one's theory of knowledge and evidence right, there is no remaining threat to religious belief or natural religion. Hence, Reid put his labor into a big second book on epistemology (EIP). Fourth, Reid worked in an atmosphere of complacent theism.¹⁰ The deist controversy was well behind, and

⁵Judging by the delayed response to Hume's *Dialogues*, it would seem that many of Reid's contemporaries were similarly underwhelmed. According to M.A. Stewart, the first substantial common sense response to Hume's *Dialogues* is by Dugald Stewart in 1828. (Stewart 2002b: note 43, Stewart, *Active*: III.ii)

⁶Reid probably thought his fellow Aberdeen Philosophical Society members George Campbell and Alexander Gerard had adequately refuted those arguments. (Campbell 1983, Gerard 1766, Broadie 2002 section 5, McCosh 1875: Ch. 25, 30, Stewart 2002b.)

⁷These student notes are partially transcribed in Stewart 2002a and Michael 1987: 520-526.

⁸For other such speculations see Duncan 1981: xx-xxiii.

⁹Cf. Stewart "Account": 10.

¹⁰The difference between his intellectual climate and ours can be seen in his addressing a concern we wouldn't think worth mentioning:

Some have doubted if ever any one was sincerely an Atheist, but this is an idle doubt, for there is no doctrine that may not be disbelieved. One would, indeed, imagine that to a thinking man, there must appear... much design in the universe, that all the objections to it cannot even make it doubtful, but

miscellaneous “free thinkers” posed little threat. One has to remember that for thoughtful people natural teleology was a huge barrier to atheism before the general acceptance of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Even Hume, patron saint of many a latter-day atheist, declined to espouse atheism, and apparently had beliefs incompatible with it.¹¹ In this atmosphere, there was no pressing need for an unassailable argument for God’s existence, or a carefully wrought free will defense, etc. Materialism (in the form of materialist philosophies of mind) and skepticism *were* living threats for Reid (PRLS: 30-56, 125-241), but not atheism *per se*. But aside from atheism, there remained a universe of false and unduly speculative claims about the divine, and Reid was concerned to address these and outline a right-headed natural theology for his students.

II. ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Before lecturing on theism, Reid gives a twofold diagnosis of “speculative” atheism. Looking to the ancient world for examples of this, he posits two causes. The first is “false systems of philosophy by which they thought to account for the formation of the World and what happens in it without once bringing in a wise and intelligent maker” (1780: 20; LNT: 3).¹² In Reid’s view these groundless and pseudo-explanatory hypotheses are cast out by careful attention to nature, yielding discovery of the manifold marks of design (more on this shortly). Secondly, “It was intended... to free mens minds from the fear of punishment for their crimes in an after state To free them from all reflections on the future or remorse for the past” (1780: 21; LNT: 3).¹³ Reid declares this misguided. From atheism, it doesn’t follow that there is no life after death, nor that our fate there doesn’t passion and prejudices may lead a man not only to doubt of this, but even to believe transubstantiation (1769: 49-50)

¹¹Gaskin 1988: 6-7, 217-223; Gaskin 1993: 319-322; Popkin 1965: ix-xiv.

¹²Cf. 1775: lect. 55-56, 1766: 77, 86.

¹³Cf. 1775: lect. 55, 1768: 58, 1766: 61-62.

depend on the lives we lead here. To the contrary, he argues that dualism is reasonable, and that by analogy with other forms of life, there is good reason to think that we'll survive death with our character intact.¹⁴ Further, atheism is not conducive to peace of mind, while theism is. (1780: 21-31; LNT: 4-9, 1775: lect. 55-56, 1769: 50-52, 1768: 58-59, 1766: 62-63)

In his lectures Reid mentions several lines of argument to God's existence: (1) a cosmological argument, (2) a design argument, (3) an argument from the nearly unanimous consent of humans everywhere through the ages, (4) an argument from empirical evidence that the world is not eternal, and (5) an argument from miracles.¹⁵ Concerning these five Reid pronounces (in a Clarkean tone), "All which being put together amount to an Absolute certainty and Demonstration that there is a first Cause possessed of all possible perfections, who must have Existed from all Eternity" (1766: 76).¹⁶ Reid fully presents only the first two arguments in his natural religion lectures, spending more energy on the second.

In Reid's eyes, Clarke's cosmological argument is a triumph. It shows that some one thing "must have existed from all Eternity uncaused and uncreated" (1775: lect. 57). His argument for this conclusion, mostly a condensation of Clarke's *Demonstration*,¹⁷ is something like the following (in his lectures this is frequently compressed or scattered in

¹⁴For Reid's full arguments on dualism and the afterlife, see NDS, 1780: lect. 71-72, 1775: lect. 52-54, 1769: 43-44, 1768: 51-57, 1766: 54-59. This discussion comes at the end of his pneumatology lectures, just before the natural theology lectures, and is clearly inspired by the first chapter of Joseph Butler's *Analogy*.
¹⁵(3) and (4) are mentioned at 1780: 104; LNT: 58; 1769: 70-71, 1766: 76, and (5) is mentioned at 1766: 76.

¹⁶Cf. Clarke, *Demonstration*: I, III, XII, 8, 15-16, 91-92. According to Reid's mature views, these can't amount to a strict demonstration (EIP VII.i: 477a), but "many things are certain for which we have only that kind of evidence which philosophers call probable." (EIP VII.iii: 484b)

¹⁷M.A. Stewart points out in correspondence that several authors contemporary with Reid were propagating various cosmological arguments. I take it that Clarke is Reid's main source because he recommends to his students "Dr Clarke upon the Being and attributes of God" (1768: 78), doesn't mention other sources in these contexts, shows in several places that he's aware of what Clarke calls his argument *a priori*, and uses many of Clarke's metaphors, supporting claims, and language.

discussions of various divine attributes). The universe either began to exist at some past point, or it has always existed. If it began to exist, then there must have been at least one cause of the universe, as it is a first principle and a necessary truth that what begins to exist has a cause. If the universe had an infinite past, there would be an infinite chain of causes and effects. Though on this supposition the universe never began to exist, there must be an explanation for the fact of its existence, as it is also a first principle that there is a cause or an explanation for the existence of any thing.¹⁸ The supposition of an infinite past chain of causes with no cause of the whole chain is thus impossible. The explanation for this infinitely old universe must be in terms of some other thing, for both the parts and the whole of the universe seem to be metaphysically dependent and non-self-explaining. There must be at least one cause of it, then, which is metaphysically independent.

Reid castigates Hume for calling into question the epistemic status of the first principle,¹⁹ which Reid argues has always been believed, is necessary to common life and the legal system, is as certain as a mathematical axiom, and is believed in common life even by Hume. Hume's theory of knowledge implies that this principle is not self-evident, but so much the worse for his theory. (1780: 32-37; LNT: 10-15, 1775: lect. 56-57, 1769: 73-74, 1768: 61-64)²⁰

Whatever is independent must be necessary as well. Every being is either necessary or contingent, and whatever is contingent depends on the will of some other

¹⁸Reid doesn't clearly distinguish this first principle from the previous one, or from the claim that all events have causes, all changes have causes, all modes of existence have causes, or (sometimes) the tautological formula that all effects have causes. He seems to use these interchangeably (e.g. EIP VI.vi: 455a, 457a, EAP IV.ii: 603a, W: 58b, 65b, 82a, 1780: 34; LNT: 13, 1775: lect. 56, 1768: 60-61), yet to be valid the argument clearly requires the two different principles. On such principles and Reid's theory of free will see Tuggy 2000: 15-16. For evaluation of this first stage of the Clarke argument, see Rowe 2002 and Rowe 1998.

¹⁹*Treatise*: 1.3.3, 56-58. See previous note.

²⁰The clarified and developed final version of this response to Hume, with an argument that the causal principle is a first principle, is at EIP VI.vi: 455-457.

being. An independent being “derives his power and his existence from no other being”; therefore, an independent being must be necessary as well. (1780: 113; LNT: 66)

Thus far the argument purports to prove that there’s at least one independent and necessary being which is the cause of the cosmos. We can also argue that there is only one such being, both *a posteriori* and *a priori*. Observing our law-governed universe, we find the same laws operative at every place and time we know of, and this confirms monotheism over polytheism, which posits many deities each with her own domain of influence and the potential to clash. (1780: 136-137; LNT: 81, 1768: 82-83, 1766: 81) All too briefly, Reid tries to show *a priori* the impossibility of more than one independent and necessary being from two angles. First, “When once it’s Discovered that the Deity is a necessary, and Self existant being, it’s impossible to set bounds to any of his perfections.” We must ascribe to him “Every Attribute which can make a Being the Object of our adoration and esteem” (1766: 78).²¹ One of these is uniqueness or unity; therefore, there can only be one God. (1780: 137; LNT: 81) Second, two beings which were omnipresent, eternal, and in possession of all perfections could not differ in any way. But by the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, any numerically distinct individuals must differ in some respect.²² Therefore, there could not be more than one such being. (1780: 137-138; LNT: 81-82, 1769: 81-82, 1768: 83)²³

The cosmological argument produces one more significant conclusion. “The same light of reason that convinces us that there can be no existence without a cause, convinces us that every cause cannot produce every effect” (1780: 34; LNT: 13). To produce this

²¹Cf. 1780: 125-126; LNT: 73, 1769: 76-77. The manuscript has two pages numbered “78”; the quotation is from the second of these.

²²Cf. Leibniz, “Primary Truths”: 32.

²³This part of Reid’s cosmological argument doesn’t derive from Clarke, who offers different *a priori* means to prove divine uniqueness. (*Demonstration*: VII, 35-38.) In the earliest extant set of notes, Reid argues that the supposition of two deities implies the existence of two eternities and two immensities, which is impossible. (1766: 81) Presumably, this assumes the Clarkean identification of time and space with those divine attributes, an identification which Reid later declines to follow.

sort of world, the first cause must have certain features itself. “Every real excellence in the effect is to be found in the cause” (1780: 142; LNT: 84).²⁴ The upshot is this: given that the cosmos contains creatures with life, power, intelligence, and moral virtue, the first cause must have those features as well. (1775: lect. 57, 1780: 142; LNT: 84)

One wonders why the Clarkeian cosmological argument, which plays such a crucial role in his natural religion lectures, makes no appearance in EIP or EAP.²⁵ One hypothesis would be that after he stopped lecturing, a reading of Hume’s *Dialogues* section IX persuaded him that the argument had some defect or at least raised serious doubts in Reid’s mind about it. Three considerations rule this out. First, some of Hume’s objections there depend on controversial epistemological claims which Reid rejects.²⁶ Second, as recent research has shown, Hume’s chapter lands few (if any) blows against a Clarkeian cosmological argument; rather, it shows that Hume had no clear grasp of it.²⁷ Third, in a late letter (dateable to between the summer of 1789 and some time in 1792) Reid gives a compressed version of the core of the Clarkeian argument. (W 84b) The answer to our puzzle is simply this: had Reid’s main aims in his books included arguing for divine eternity, independence, necessity, perfection, or uniqueness he would have included the extended cosmological argument. Those claims simply weren’t at issue

²⁴Cf. 1769: 77, 1768: 84. Reid rules out bodily traits as being “perfections” (e.g. having shapely calves or beautiful eyes) “It is only what belongs to Man as a rational creature that we must ascribe to Deity” (1780: 141; LNT: 84). He believes that there is a common sense distinction between properties that do and don’t contribute to greatness, or perhaps glory, or moral goodness. (1780: 126-127; LNT: 73-74) Unlike Reid, Clarke tries his hand at an argument for the causal excellence principle. (*Demonstration*: VIII, 38-46; for criticism see Rowe 1998: 238-242.) Reid also makes the stronger claims that “we cannot help thinking that there is more perfection in the cause than in the effect” (1780: 156; LNT: 94; cf. Clarke, *Demonstration*: VIII, 38) and “every perfection or real excellence which we perceive in the creation belongs in a much higher degree to the Creator”(1780: 127; LNT: 74). For Descartes’ use of such principles see Clatterbaugh 1999: 17-45.

²⁵At one point in EIP, Reid mentions without endorsing the argument in the context of disavowing Clarke’s speculations that space and time are divine attributes. (EIP III.iii: 343b)

²⁶Gaskin 1988: 77-78.

²⁷Stewart 1985, Yandell 1993: 223-242.

there.

Reid belongs to the still living tradition which supplements a cosmological argument with a teleological argument.²⁸ His final statement of the latter is as follows:

1. Design and intelligence in the cause, may, with certainty, be inferred from marks or signs of it in the effect.
2. There are in fact the clearest marks of design and wisdom in the works of nature.
3. The works of nature are the effects of a wise and intelligent Cause. (EIP VI.vi: 460-461)²⁹

The truth of 2, he thinks, is apparent to any unprejudiced and careful observer of nature. “As to final causes, they stare us in the face wherever we cast our eyes” (W: 58a). In his lectures Reid goes through numerous examples of natural teleology, emphasizing what is useful to humankind, in something like this sequence: stars, solar system, gross features of the earth, plant life, animal bodies, animal instincts, human bodies, and the human mind. (1780: 39-90; LNT: 16-49, 1775: lect. 57-59, 1769: 52-62, 1768: 62-75, 1766: 63-73) The most interesting and original of these observations are the final ones, where Reid displays his skill at observing the human faculties, instincts, natural affections, developmental stages, and tendencies, which make individual and corporate human life as we know it possible.³⁰ The advance of science, he says, only strengthens the design argument, as it uncovers more examples of apparent design. (EIP VI.vi: 460b) Reid

²⁸E.g. Willard 1990: 201-213.

²⁹Cf. 1780: 96; LNT: 54. For some puzzling features of this short form of Reid’s argument see Stewart 2002a.

³⁰This material is recast and expanded in Reid’s last book. (EAP I.viii: 529, II.ii: 533-534, III.iii: 545-549, III.ii.iii-vi: 558-575a, III.iii.viii: 594b-599, V.vi: 666.)

defends 1 as a first principle, something which we know, but not by reasoning or experience, and claims that it is a necessary truth. (EIP VI.vi: 457b-460a)

Initially, there are two ways to understand his first premise.³¹

1a. Necessarily, if anything exhibits marks of design, then it was caused to exist by at least one intelligent agent.

1b. Necessarily, if anything exhibits marks of design, we can infer with a high degree of certainty that it was caused to exist by at least one intelligent agent.

Several factors suggest 1a. 1 occurs in Reid's list of the first principles which are necessary truths in the realm of metaphysics, not about principles of evidence or inference. A necessary truth is one whose contrary is impossible (EIP VI.v: 441b), thus 1a says that it is absolutely impossible that something not designed exhibit marks of design. If this is his claim, we must know what he means by "marks of design". He seems to think of these as regularity and variety of structure, and fitness of structure to some end. (EIP VIII.iv: 505a, 1769: 63) With Cicero, he agrees that some degree of regularity can come from an unintelligent cause, but claims it is obviously absurd to assert that a complex thing like a sentence or 400 aces thrown on a die in a row came about by chance. (1780: 92; LNT: 52) On the present reading, this is absurd because the thing is impossible; "An effect produced without design can never manifest design" (1769: 64). 1 can't be known by experience, Reid says, in part because experience can never reveal a necessary connection, here between a property in the object and a property in its maker (*not* between the fact of apparent design and the appropriateness of an inference to a designer). (EIP VI.vi: 460a) Again, this reading of 1 seems to sit well with the causal

³¹For language that alternately suggests each of these readings see EIP VI.vi: 460a.

excellence principle, which is presented as a necessary truth about causal relations. Finally, on this reading, the argument is valid and purports to prove God's existence.

Charity urges a way around this reading, for 1a is false. Some examples of apparent design do come from unintelligent causes; pebbles on some beaches are nicely arranged according to size, yet the arranger was merely the waves. And though it has never happened, surely it is possible that an avalanche occurs and the rocks fall to perfectly spell out "Eat at Joes!" Fortunately for Reid, other passages militate against the interpretation of 1 as 1a. For one thing, Reid phrases 1 as a necessarily true rule of inference, not a description of what must be, a metaphysical principle. (EIP VI.vi: 460b, 1780: 95, 97; LNT: 53, 55) For another thing, some of Reid's remarks in his lectures seem inconsistent with 1a.

If a scratch be made upon the sand, it is infinite to one, if it be a circle, or a parabola, an undesigning cause could never have rounded much less have properly placed a single wheel in a machine But if the parabola or a wheel... properly placed be presented to us it immediately shaeks our belief to hear that either of them proceeded from undesigning chance. We may therefore with certainty conclude that the world which evidences so much wisdom and design must have been formed by a designing cause. (1769: 64-65)

By saying the odds are infinite to one against the marks of design having arisen without an intelligent cause, Reid seems to say that this scenario is not impossible but only overwhelmingly unlikely. (Cf. EIP VI.vi: 459b) There is also Reid's repeated claim that

...there is as much reason to believe that there is a supreme being, as that there are minds besides our own. From the actions of a human being conducted with wisdom and design

we conclude that this being has an intelligent mind, and this is all the evidence we have of it. ...even in the formation of a human body, there is much more design displayed than in any human action In both cases we see not the cause, but trace it out by the effects. (1769: 65)³²

It is not, we may suppose, a contradiction that our fellow humans act as they do and are nonetheless automatons; all the same, we have extremely strong grounds for our belief that they are conscious, intelligent beings like ourselves. The evidence is conclusive without implying the conclusion - similarly with marks of design and the designer hypothesis. In what sense is the evidence in the two cases (God and other minds) supposed to be “the same”? Is it the kind or the amount that is at issue? The main point is that there is the same kind of evidence for each, so that it is arbitrary to recognize it in one and not the other. As to amount, we have either more or the same amount of evidence for God’s existence than for other minds! (1780: 129; LNT: 75, EIP VI.v: 449a) Thus, ...the man who maintains that there is no force in the argument from final causes, must, if he will be consistent, see no evidence of the existence of any intelligent being but himself. (EIP VI.vi: 461b)

Against this second reading of the argument is the fact that the argument (1b, 2, 3) would be invalid. But this easily remedied, if revise 3 to 3a by adding the preface, “We may believe that...”. This remedy, however, comes with a price; on this reading, the argument is not for God’s existence, but for that rationality of belief in God’s existence. Interesting though this argument may be, it doesn’t seem to represent what Reid is up to. He means

³²Cf. EIP VI.vi: 461b, 1780: 99-100, 129; LNT: 56, 75, 1766: 73-74. See also Reid’s logic lectures transcribed in Stewart 2002a, Michael 1987: 523-525.

to be exploring the grounds for believing and knowing that God exists, not the grounds for believing and knowing that our belief in God is rational.

Thus far we haven't found a satisfying reading of Reid's design argument. I suggest there is a third reading. If 3 (not 3a) is really what is at issue, then perhaps the argument shouldn't really be read as a valid deductive argument, but rather probabilistically, so that the premises support without implying the conclusion. The occurrence of "certainty" in 1 should perhaps be read in light of Reid's belief that "many things are certain for which we have only that kind of evidence which philosophers call probable" (EIP VII.iii: 484b). Perhaps what he wants to say is that

1c. Necessarily, if anything exhibits marks of design, then it is overwhelmingly probable that it was caused to exist by at least one intelligent agent.

Perhaps this is what Reid is getting at; this would be what makes 1b true. Combined with 2, he would have an argument that gives strong support to 3. As Reid is a fallibilist, he can say that in this way we *know* 3 and are entitled to be certain about 3.

Several things can be said in favor of reading 1 as 1c. First, 1c is a plausible candidate for being a first principle, as it deals with things,³³ not inferences or beliefs about them, and it arguably has all of Reid's marks of a first principle. (EIP VI.iv: 439-440) Second, the argument on this reading (1c, 2, 3) seems to properly mirror the natural belief-formation that Reid has in mind. One confusing thing about this discussion is that Reid is blending psychology and argument. He is manifestly giving an argument reflective folk can use to argue for the claim that God exists. But he is also describing a

³³On the present suggestion the conception of probability in 1c is one of proportion. 1c shorn of the initial "Necessarily" is true just because of all the things great and small which exhibit apparent design, most of them are in fact designed. 1c as written will be true just in case of all things in all possible worlds which exhibit apparent design, most of them are designed.

process of belief-formation which occurs in most people, whether or not they ever get into the game of offering philosophical arguments. That process is: we carefully observe the intricate and wonderful web of apparent design in nature, and this triggers an overwhelmingly strong propensity to believe that this is the product of intelligence. Hence we find ourselves with a firm belief in 3. The strength of the propensity is matched with the strong objective likelihood of at least one designing cause's involvement. Just as one can form false beliefs via this belief-forming process, so the premises of the argument don't imply the conclusion. Both the tendency to believe and the proposition 1c couldn't not be, so to speak; both are "necessary", though in different senses. The first is unavoidable given our nature, and the second is true with metaphysical necessity. Third, this reading, though it clashes with his syllogism terminology, fits his discussion quite well, namely: the passages cited above in my rejection of 1a, his quotations from Cicero and Tillotson, and his declining to follow other philosophers in mounting an argument for the first principle. (EIP VI.vi: 458-459) What he says in this last passage is revealing. What is it that those authors try to argue for, but which Reid thinks need not be argued for? It is "how improbable it is that a regular arrangement of parts should be the effect of chance, or that it should not be the effect of design" (EIP VI.vi: 459b). Gone is the talk of inference, and in its stead we have propositions equivalent to 1c. I suggest that the phrase "may, with certainty, be inferred" is used by Reid to soften the connection between actual and apparent design. He means to say something weaker than 1a, and misleadingly suggests 1b, though what he's really interested in is the objective unlikelihood of apparent without actual design, as in 1c. While this reading has its own problems³⁴, I offer it as a reading of what Reid is up to, and a thesis worthy of further discussion. It may well be that Reid was simply not clear about what he wanted his design argument to

³⁴Among them: Can 1c be a necessary truth?

be, so there may be no unambiguous interpretation which captures what Reid really thought. Even if that is so, we can consider whether the preceding is what he should have said given his commitments, aims, and intuitions.

On this reading, does Reid tragically offer a design argument which has already been refuted by Hume? Though the matter deserves a full discussion, on the face of it, it seems that Hume does no damage, for the argument is neither an inductive generalization, nor based on an analogy between objects, nor supposed to stand all by itself.³⁵ The point that Elliot Sober makes about William Paley's design argument applies equally well to Reid's.³⁶ Rather than comparing things (artifacts and natural things, or artifacts and the whole world), Reid is comparing inferences or belief-acquisitions. It is not to the point to play up the overall dissimilarity of natural things and artifacts, for the argument's strength doesn't depend on that, but only on the inferences or belief-acquisitions involved having similar grounds.

If therefore from seeing a curious engine we conceive that it had a wise and skillfull Maker, must we not in a much higher degree apply these qualities to [the] contriver and maker of the curious fabric of the human body. (1780: 75-76; LNT: 41)³⁷

Just as we form the belief upon seeing a watch that it was designed, or upon observing a course of action that it results from the decisions of a conscious agent like ourselves, or upon observing certain actions we form the belief that there is an actor carrying them out who is brave, so when we carefully observe the sky, the earth, the animal and plant kingdoms, and the human body and mind, we form the belief that these are the product of

³⁵That is, it is part of a two pronged approach with the extended cosmological argument above.

³⁶Sober 1993: 30-33.

³⁷Cf. 1780: 46; LNT: 21, EAP IV.viii: 623a

at least one exceptionally wise and good agent. Reid views both inferences or belief-acquisitions as issuing from a single built-in tendency. Had he gone on to argue that apparent design is probable given theism but improbable given atheism, then he would have had an inference to the best explanation argument for theism. While he veers near this approach in his lectures by considering theism in relation to competing theories,³⁸ in the end he rests content with his claim 1c. It is a first principle, something we all naturally believe and know, unless love for some cherished hypothesis causes us to lose or never form the belief. (EIP VI.vi: 461) It seems that if Hume refutes this design argument, it is only by putting forth a superior account of what things we are entitled to remain certain about even though we can't argue for them.

III. GOD AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Contemporary readers wonder: is Reid a proto-Reformed-Epistemologist? One has to answer that question negatively, with an important qualification. On this Reid agrees with Reformed Epistemology: more people than can understand various tricky metaphysical arguments can know that a good and intelligent designer of the world exists. This is by way of the quick and natural reasoning process mirrored by the design argument. But on other things, he disagrees. First, by the amount of time he spends on two arguments for God's existence, it is evident that he doesn't hold, as at least some radical forebears of Reformed Epistemology did, that such arguments are useless, wrong-headed, or morally

³⁸Reid had nothing like post-Darwin evolutionary theory to contend with, but only various fantastic flights of speculation on the origins of the world, which he rightly saw as intellectually worthless. (e.g. 1766: 77, 86, W: 54b) For the relevance of Darwin to inference to the best explanation design arguments see Sober 1993: 30-54. If Clarke's and Reid's causal excellence principle were defensible, they would have an *a priori* argument against evolutionary theory understood as not including intelligent agency. Unfortunately, Reid merely asserts this principle, Clarke gives a compressed and unconvincing argument for it (Clarke, *Demonstration*: VIII, 38-46), and many sorts of counterexamples threaten it. (E.g. Two unmusical parents produce a Mozart. An essentially incorruptible God produces virtuous agents who can resist real temptation.)

objectionable. Thus he has no sympathy for what Plantinga calls the reformed objection to natural theology.³⁹ Second, while it can be known by all without benefit of any lengthy reasoning process that a good and intelligent designer of the world exists, this belief is not, as Plantinga says, “properly basic”, because for Reid it is not basic, but believed on the basis of other beliefs (in 1c and 2 of section II above). Third, Reid doesn’t posit a *sensus divinitatis* – a natural faculty of forming true beliefs about God in various circumstances - though his faculty approach to epistemology and rejection of what Plantinga calls classical foundationalism have provided considerable inspiration to those who do.⁴⁰ We don’t need any such extra faculty, for we already have an inbuilt tendency to detect intelligence behind apparent design; the tendency that (upon carefully noticing the intricate apparent design in the natural world) yields belief in God is the same one that (upon certain social experiences) yields belief in other conscious humans.⁴¹ Fourth, even if belief in God were basic for Reid, that belief lacks most of Reid’s marks of a first principle. It isn’t necessary to everyday life, doesn’t appear too early to come from education or reasoning, isn’t as universally believed as most of his first principles, and can’t be argued for by showing that denying it leads to practical absurdities. (Cf. EIP VI.iv: 439-440) I take it that for Reid, what is not a first principle is not properly basic.

There is another strategy that Reid mentions for arguing that something is a first principle - a kind of parity argument. A Reformed Epistemologist in search of an ally could quote Reid back at him, “It is a good argument *ad hominem*, if it can be shewn that a first principle which a man rejects, stands upon the same footing with others which he

³⁹Plantinga 1983: 63-71. Plantinga mentions without endorsing this objection, and is on record as rejecting it. (Plantinga 1986)

⁴⁰Alston 1991: 149-165, Plantinga 2000: 170-179, Plantinga 1983: 48ff, Wolterstorff 1983: 148-155.

⁴¹The Reformed Epistemologist can reply that faculty individuation is difficult and perhaps somewhat arbitrary, but there’s no barrier to her admitting that one natural tendency is the source of belief in both God and other minds, and that it results not in properly basic theistic belief but rather non-basic, warranted belief, or a premise of a quick argument for or inference to theism. (Cf. Plantinga 2000: 176, Alston 1991: 165-167) Something like this sort of *sensus divinitatis* is one Reid could accept.

admits” (EIP VI.iv: 439a). And, turning to his account of our knowledge of other minds, “The very same argument applied to the works of nature, leads us to conclude that there is an intelligent Author of nature, and appears equally strong and obvious in the last case as in the first” (EIP VI.v: 449a). How can Reid deny that the theistic proposition is a first principle, if it is supported by the same kind of argument, and issues from the same innate belief-forming tendency in us as belief in other minds?

Reid can reply that no matter how certain, firmly held, or well-grounded the theistic belief is once formed (and perhaps reinforced by habit, further experience, and argument) it is not “automatic” enough to be a first principle. Belief in other minds is forced on us very early in our lives by our social experiences, and we can’t shake it thereafter (short of insanity). By contrast, belief in God isn’t automatically formed; it isn’t inevitable given the normal course of human life. We have to deliberately pay attention to the structure of the natural world for the God/other minds belief-forming tendency to be triggered. Moreover, these triggering experiences can be permanently avoided or short-circuited by adherence to hypotheses inconsistent with theism. And as we know, theistic belief is loseable. So far, Reid has principled reasons for resisting any claim that the existence of good and intelligent maker of the world is a first principle or a properly basic belief.

A serious difficulty remains.⁴² Isn’t testimony a source of properly basic belief, and thus immediate knowledge, perhaps even the source of the majority of what we know? (B: 193, EIP VII.iii: 482-483) A number of witnesses tell us throughout our lives that God exists, so can’t we know that he exists by accepting their testimony? If so, belief in God will be properly basic after all. As we’ve seen, Reid casts a friendly glance at an argument for God’s existence based on miracles, so apparently he wouldn’t take a

⁴²I thank Terence Cuneo for pressing this objection in correspondence.

Humean stance on religious testimony.⁴³ Further, in his logic lectures, he asserts that solid testimony can give us knowledge that a miracle happened, a deviation in the normal course of nature wrought by the hand of God.⁴⁴ If testimony tells me that God did X, doesn't it thereby tell me that God exists? Reid's interest in our natural propensities to tell the truth and to believe what others say is largely psychological and developmental; for this reason his theory of knowledge is under-developed on a crucial point: What is the scope of what we can know through testimony? Still, he does claim that testimony is a distinct source of knowledge. If Reid can find no principled grounds for discounting the mass of testimony concerning God's existence, then his epistemology of testimony clashes with his religious epistemology as interpreted in this section and the preceding one.

IV. DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

There are three ways we can determine the divine attributes: (1) reasoning from the marks of certain attributes in the cosmos, (2) recognizing what attributes are implied by God's necessary existence, and (3) reasoning from God's unlimited perfections. (1780: 107, 155; LNT: 62-63, 93, 1769: 72-73, 1768: 78, 1766: 77)⁴⁵ The Clarkean cosmological argument establishes that there is a necessary and unlimited being, legitimating the second and third ways.

Reid divides God's attributes into the natural and moral. The former are: eternity (everlastingness, not timelessness), necessity, independence, immensity (omnipresence), unlimited power, unlimited perfection, perfect knowledge and wisdom, spirituality, unity (uniqueness), and immutable happiness. The latter are goodness, mercy, forbearance,

⁴³Hume, *Enquiry*: X, 169-186.

⁴⁴Michael 1987: 525.

⁴⁵Cf. the different list relating to moral attributes at EAP IV.xi: 633b.

veracity, love of virtue, hatred of vice, justice, and freedom.⁴⁶ One can argue for each of these divine attributes from either reason alone or revelation. (1780: 138-147; LNT: 82-87)

Commentators note that in Hume's *Dialogues* a common sort of theist is conspicuous by her absence: one who neither puts all of her eggs in the basket of the design argument nor "is so skeptically pious that she ascribes no properties to God."⁴⁷ As we've seen, Reid is such a theist. When it comes to knowing the divine attributes, Reid complains that Hume in *Enquiry* XI arbitrarily limits us to the first method of determining divine attributes. (1780: 108; LNT: 63) Hume claims, in Reid's paraphrase, that

...we have no reason to [attribute to] the Supreme Being wisdom, power, or intelligence, in a higher degree than what we see Manifested... in his works; a conclusion evidently grounded on this, that a cause is exactly proportioned to its effect. as therefore these marks of wisdom and [etc.] are limited, so we must conclude that this cause, that is, the perfections of the Deity are limited. (1780: 151-152; LNT: 91)⁴⁸

Reid makes two replies. First, contrary to Hume's restriction, we can prove many divine perfections "reasoning from the Necessary Existence of Deity and his unlimited perfections" (1780: 153; LNT: 93). Second, Hume's proportionality principle

...may perhaps be true of natural causes, but as to intelligent causes which operate freely

⁴⁶1780: 32-39, 75-77, 104-151; LNT: 10-16, 41-42, 61-91, 1775: lect. 56-57, 1769: 72-90, 1768: 78-79, 1766: 75-83, EAP IV.viii: 623-624.

⁴⁷Yandell 1990: 166. In the earlier *Enquiry* discussion Hume also has a Cleanthean believer in his sights, who thinks that "the chief or sole argument for a divine existence... is derived from the order of nature" (*Enquiry*: XI, 189)

⁴⁸Cf. 1769: 66-71, 1766: 84.

and voluntary, this maxim is not founded on reason. ...Suppose I should ask a man, on a journey, pray which is the road to Edinburgh? and... he returns me a pertinent answer. ...Am I therefore to conclude that his understanding just enabled him to answer my question and neither more nor less? surely this would be absurd - the natural conclusion is, that he has such a degree, how much more I do not know. ...this maxim of Mr. Humes, when applied to voluntary causes is neither selfevident nor consistent with our reasoning about causes in common Life. (1780: 153-154; LNT: 92-93)⁴⁹

Reid attributes another objection regarding knowledge of divine attributes to Hobbes, Bolingbroke, and Hume in his *Dialogues*. These philosophers admit

...that there must be a first cause possessed of power, wisdom, and the other natural attributes we have ascribed to him, but maintained that we know nothing of his moral attributes or the principles of his action; when we talk of his goodness, Mercy, or justice, we use, says he,⁵⁰ words without meaning. (1780: 158; LNT: 95)⁵¹

Reid replies that “We... have the same reason to ascribe justice and goodness to the Deity as power and intelligence nor is there the least ground to think his moral... attributes More incomprehensible than his natural attributes” (1780: 158-159; LNT: 95). Further, moral truths are necessary, so it make no sense to suppose that God “thinks morally ill what we think morally good and the contrary” (1780: 159; LNT: 97). God’s moral knowledge exceeds but includes ours.

⁴⁹Cf. 1766: 84.

⁵⁰From the context this evidently refers to Bolingbroke.

⁵¹Cf. 1768: 86. This 1780 passage suggests that Reid didn’t spend much energy on Hume’s *Dialogues*, as nothing there suggests that Hume believes in a being with all of what Reid calls the natural divine attributes (see IV below). Reid’s misinterpretation may be based on a less than careful reading of *Dialogues* XI-XII, 74-78.

V. EVIL

Reid is interested in evil as a source of objections against “a good government of the World”, and as an invitation to speculative mischief, in the form of baseless schemes designed to explain its presence. (1780: 166; LNT: 101) Good but vain or overzealous people concoct bad theodicies, and bad people use evil as an excuse for atheism. (1769: 90-92, 98, 1766: 84-85) The chief failed theodicies in view are Leibniz’s and the “Manichean” scheme explored by Bayle.⁵² “The Manichean System... supposes that there are 2 eternal intelligent powerful beings so that the one can not prevent the actions of the other and the one good the other the author of all the evils in the world” (1768: 90). Bayle argues that traditional believers cannot refute this rival hypothesis, which is part of his larger case that reason can’t dispel important objections to religious belief.⁵³ Reid has little patience for Bayle’s fideism, alleging that Bayle “advances this System rather to show his talents, than from any conviction” (1768: 91). Moreover, this system can be disproved. If one of the two ultimate principles were more powerful, he’d banish the other from any influence in the world. And if they were equally powerful and had

...contrary wills they would perfectly ballance one another, and could produce nothing. The Phenomena of nature do not support this hypothesis, for there is evidently more good than evil, Besides there is no occasion to have recourse to two principles, because we can account for evil more Phylosophically and more simply from one... (1769: 97)

In Reid’s view, theism accounts for evil better than her rivals, and no sort of evil provides

⁵²Leibniz, *Theodicy*; Bayle, *Dictionary*: “Manicheans”, “Paulicans”, 144-163, 166-193. Bayle is quoted and discussed at length by Leibniz.

⁵³Bayle, *Dictionary*: “Clarifications” IV, “Second Clarification”, 397, 409-20.

significant evidence against the world being ruled by a good God.

Reid distinguishes three kinds of evil: evils of imperfection, natural evil, and moral evil. (EAP 1780: 166-167; LNT: 101, 1769: 92, 1768: 87, 1766: 85-86) “Evils” of imperfection are not really evils, but merely the lack of some good (e.g. humans being limited in knowledge and power). “Imperfection must cleave to every order of created beings tho’ the Oyster were as high as the Seraph” (1769: 92). No matter how perfect the creation, there would still be an infinite distance between God and creatures. Reid assumes that God has no duty to refrain from creating, and further, that creation implies some lack of goodness in the product. Thus in all possible universes creatures can complain about their limits - “...even the Worm, may thus put in it’s claim for greater perfection” (1766: 87)⁵⁴ - but these seem to be unjustified complaints about something which is unavoidable, if there is to be any creation.

Reid makes four points about natural evils. First, given the present constitution of humans and their environment, natural evils are necessary for us to develop virtues such as prudence, wisdom, patience, and fortitude. Some of this suffering, then, serves a purpose, as it is the discipline of a loving Father. We can’t tell whether it is metaphysically possible for there to be creatures who develop these virtues without suffering. (1780: 168; LNT: 101-102, 1769: 93, 1768: 88). Second, with some exaggeration, Reid comments:

We ought to consider how far natural evil may be a punishment of moral evil... Many of the most greivous natural evils are the consequences of Vices, and indeed if all vice were removed there would be little pain at all, and this earth would be a paradise. Almost all the evils we are liable to are consequences either of our own folly or of some other

⁵⁴Cf. 1769: 85, 1780: 167; LNT: 101.

persons. (1769: 93-94)⁵⁵

Third, "...as far as we perceive they [natural evils] are necessary consequences of good general laws", and "without these they [rational creatures] could never pursue any means to the attainment of an end" (1780: 168; LNT: 102).⁵⁶ Further, these laws "are infinitely more useful, than the Evils are hurtful which flow from them" (1766: 87).⁵⁷ If philosophers claim there could be laws which bring along fewer natural evils, "this is swimming beyond our Depth" (1766: 87). Fourth, while in "the present Establishment... Happiness is far more prevalent than misery" (1766: 88), "we cannot determine what proportion this evil bears to the sum of the enjoyment of God's creatures. We see a small part and can't judge of the whole of the Universe" (1780: 168; LNT: 102). "We are better judges of evil as it respects individuals than as it respects the whole universe" (1769: 93).

Like many theists, Reid believes that human free will is the key to defusing arguments from evil. If there is no free will, "then every event good or bad is to be considered as Gods doing...". But if we do have free will, "then the actions done in consequence of this [exercise of our power] are Mens only and not Gods. There is no maxim more evident than that... the action of one agent cannot be the action of another" (1780: 169; LNT: 102).⁵⁸ God "gave the power, but they [injurious actions] proceed from an abuse of that power. All moral evil then is not properly the doing of God but of men" (1780: 170; LNT: 103).⁵⁹

This strategy of Reid's immediately raises three issues. First, even if God isn't the agent of sin, the evildoer, might he not be morally responsible for making that sin

⁵⁵Cf. 1780: 15-16; LNT: 118-119.

⁵⁶Cf. 1780: 3-7; LNT: 112-114, 1769: 93, 1768: 87.

⁵⁷Cf. 1769: 85-86, 1768: 88.

⁵⁸Cf. 1766: 86.

⁵⁹Reid also makes but doesn't develop the claim that "we cannot suppose any being made so high as not to be capable of abusing his liberty" (1766: 88).

possible, by giving individuals power which he knew they would misuse? Second, isn't it false that no event can be the action of two agents, for example, the destruction of a plane by a squad of four terrorists? Third, why didn't God just arrange the circumstances so that even though all humans have free will, they only use it for good?

While Reid only explicitly answers the first question, he has philosophical resources to answer, or attempt to answer the remaining two. To the first, Reid makes the insightful reply that knowledge of the future is providentially useless. What will be, will be, and it is contradictory to suppose that God sees something will be, and based on that knowledge prevents it. (1766: 88-89, 1769: 96) Middle knowledge *would* be providentially useful, but Reid, because of his theory of human freedom, denies that there is such a thing. (EAP IV.x: 631a, 1780: 132; LNT: 76, 1769: 79, 1766: 81) Still, on any theist's views, God would know or reasonably believe this prior to creating: *Probably, were I to create a world of such and such kind, someone or other would abuse my gift of liberty.* Thus the difficulty remains.

To the second, Reid can say the following. An action is an event which has its ultimate origin in some one agent, the agent which exercised its active power to produce that event, or to start a chain that leads inexorably to it (he may require that the agent will or intend the event as well). Thus willing to shoot a man, grabbing the gun, pulling the trigger, and firing the gun at him are all actions. If these events have their ultimate origin in some one agent, they can't *also* have it in some other agent. Unfortunately for Reid, one can be praiseworthy and blameworthy for more than one's own actions in the present sense. I can be to some degree responsible for *your* freely committed crimes if I aid or motivate you in certain ways, or even if I'm culpably negligent in your upbringing. The sense of "action" Reid is interested in, whereby it is impossible for the action to belong to more than one agent, is not the only morally relevant kind of event. It is not necessary for

an agent to be blameworthy for an event, that it originate by an exercise of her active power, or that she intend or will the event to occur. Reid's "God didn't do it" strategy fails to contribute to a workable defense or theodicy. Even if he didn't commit the sins, it is conceivable that he is blameworthy for others committing them.

To the third objection Reid should but doesn't say that it is contradictory to suppose that God guarantees that everyone always freely does what is right, because it is contradictory to suppose that anyone can force or cause an exercise of active power to happen.⁶⁰ While it is logically possible that everyone freely does what is right, it is not possible that even an omnipotent being singlehandedly makes this happen. In sum, Reid has at best some materials for a free will defense, but not a theodicy. Not surprisingly, he consistently expresses pessimism about the prospects for a theodicy.⁶¹

VI. CONCLUSION

A famous Reid scholar once remarked to me that when it came to philosophy of religion, he thought Reid "never really put his head to it." This is half true. Reid did think seriously about these things over a long period of time, but as his main research interests lay elsewhere, he often only pushed his discussions as far as they needed to go for the benefit of his students. Reid's lectures on natural theology had a pastoral purpose, as is not surprising coming from an older pious man who was a father and former minister. He normally ended his natural theology lectures by expounding on the many practical benefits of theism and the unfortunate effects of atheism. (1780: 22-27; LNT: 125-128, 1769: 103-109, 1766: 92-93; cf. 1780: 30-31; LNT: 8-9, EAP III.ii.vii: 577a) Reid was convinced that this information would improve his students' lives and society as a whole.

⁶⁰EAP IV.iii: 607b, Tuggy 2000: 6. See Peterson et. al. 1998: 118-121 for a summary of how this sort of reply has been used in recent discussions.

⁶¹1766: 84-85, IHM 12, EAP IV.xi: 634.

Fully developed or not, Reid's philosophy of religion consistently clashes with our current fashions in philosophy. Because of this, we can use Reid's philosophy of religion as an occasion to examine what we take as obvious and beyond dispute.⁶²

⁶²I wish to thank Terence Cuneo, Knud Haakonssen, Michael Pace, William Rowe, James Van Cleve, Rene van Woudenberg, Paul Wood, and especially M.A. Stewart for helpful correspondence, access to valuable unpublished work, and critical comments on previous drafts. Thanks are also due to Maria Rosa Antognazza, the Reid Project at the University of Aberdeen, and Alexander Broadie for their help with research travel arrangements, the New York State/UUP Professional Development Program and the SUNY Fredonia Professional Development Committee for travel funds, and my wife Candise for her support and patience during this project.