Reid’s Inheritance from Locke, and How He Overcomes It

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REID’S VIEWS ON QUALITIES ARE CONFUSING because he read Locke before putting pen to paper. If we attend to the vagaries of Locke’s distinction, we will illuminate Reid’s and we will be able to understand why it is that Reid’s approach to metaphysics makes his distinction so intriguing.

Reid believes an adherence to the Theory of Ideas is the major cause of confusion in Locke’s analysis of secondary qualities. In section 1, I describe this confusion in Locke by characterizing three very different, though textually plausible, interpretations of Locke on secondary qualities. This will enable us, in section 2, to understand how Reid structures the debate about qualities and our perception of them. In section 3 and section 4, I describe Reid’s inchoate analysis of primary and secondary qualities. I devote special attention to whether Reidian secondary qualities are dispositions in section 5. I argue that because of problems with Locke’s metaphysical distinctions, Reid adopts an epistemic approach. I express this more formally in section 6.

I develop this analysis by examining some of its potential problems. Others have criticized what they have taken to be Reid’s distinction. One expert suggests it collapses, and another claims that it implies, a wrongheaded phenomenology of visual experience. In section 7 and section 8, I show that the present interpretation Reid’s analysis of qualities substantially avoids those charges. However, there is a more weighty criticism that I will raise in section 9. Reid’s primary/secondary quality distinction implies that we cannot directly perceive secondary qualities (on Reid’s analysis of directness), a result which threatens the coherence of his direct theory of perception.

I. THREE VERSIONS OF LOCKE

Idealists, representative realists, and direct realists can in principle agree that apprehension of a secondary quality is a causal process. They differ, though, with respect to the cause (an idea in God’s mind, an idea of an object, or an object) and the effect (an idea, a sensation, or a concept)—and about whether there is

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any cognitive intermediary. Just as important is their disagreement concerning what, in this mix of causes and effects, is to be dubbed “the secondary quality.” This is the inheritance of Locke, for he is easily interpreted as using the term ‘secondary quality’ to refer to the cause of the process, its effect, and, on the most common interpretation, the process itself—i.e., the relation between cause and effect. To ground our examination of Reid, I will state these interpretations of Locke (without evaluation).

First, Peter Alexander argues that secondary qualities are the physical causes, or bases, of sensations for Locke. There are two routes that lead him to this conclusion. The first concerns Locke’s use of language, the second Locke’s relation to Boyle. ‘Red’ and ‘sweet’ and other such terms, for Locke, typically refer to our ideas of secondary qualities rather than secondary qualities themselves. Alexander says, “colours, tastes, odours and sounds are not, for Locke, secondary qualities, but sensations; secondary qualities are colourless, tasteless, odourless and soundless textures of objects.”

Careful attention to the preceding six chapters of Book II reveals that Locke is engaged in a sustained attempt to clarify prior thinking about qualities and our ideas of qualities, argues Alexander. The central factor contributing to misrepresentations of Locke’s view is the often-overlooked fact that through section 7, Locke is engaged in a “developing argument” in which he has adopted, for better or worse, the terms of his interlocutors. This compels Alexander to distinguish two uses of ‘idea.’ Ideas “can be thought of as mental entities, when they must be in perceivers, or they can be thought of as contents, when they can qualify either perceivers or objects.” In addition, Alexander must also distinguish two senses of ‘secondary quality.’ Some of Locke’s uses of the term refer to sensations of secondary qualities, but typically the term refers to insensible, corpuscularian textures of physical bodies.

By drawing upon Locke’s debt to Boyle, Alexander finds a second source for this interpretation. Locke’s frequent appeal to ‘texture’—originally Boyle’s term—favors his interpretation because texture for Boyle is an insensible physical property of corpuscles. Texture fails the inseparability test that Locke thinks that primary qualities pass. (Recall Locke’s thought experiment at II.viii.9 about infinitely dividing a kernel of wheat.) On corpuscularianism a single corpuscle will not have texture, so texture is not a primary quality. This aids Alexander because it seems to indicate that his analysis of secondary qualities will not imply the dissolution of Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

Alexander has marshaled an interpretation of Locke according to which secondary qualities are physical properties of objects that seem to cause sensations, an interpretation with some textual plausibility. According to Alexander, however, Locke sometimes uses terms we associate with secondary qualities to refer to our concepts of secondary qualities. This point may be used to usurp Alexander’s


interpretation in favor of a second. Namely, one might think that secondary qualities are either conceptual or sensorial in nature. In other words, they are not physical bases of sensation events, nor are they the processes or dispositions by which those ideas are caused.

Georges Dicker and Jonathan Bennett see the textual reasons for such an interpretation, though they both reject it in the interest of charity. Consider Locke’s description of manna at II.viii.18. Manna "has a power to produce the sensations of sickness, and sometimes of acute pains, or gripings in us. That these ideas of sickness and pain are not in the manna, but effects of its operations on us, and are no where when we feel them not: this also every one readily agrees to." The upshot of this passage is that "these ideas," presumably the ideas of sweetness and whiteness, and of sickness and pain, are "all effects of the operations of manna, on the several parts of our bodies" by the primary qualities.4 The ostensive reason Locke denies the vulgar view that the quality of pain is in the manna rests on the point that the idea (i.e., the sensation or concept) of pain is not in the manna.

Dicker remarks, “Locke is arguing that sweetness and whiteness are not really in manna, on the grounds that these qualities, like other ideas such as pain and sickness, are merely effects in a perceiver of the primary qualities of manna’s atomic parts. . . .” If this is correct, Dicker continues, Locke “assumes that secondary-quality ideas are identical with secondary qualities themselves. . . .” Bennett comes to the same conclusion for much the same reason. Irrespective of the truth of this interpretation, it is one that makes good sense of a few critical sections of Locke’s discussion of secondary qualities to a degree that alternatives do not.

The third interpretation of Locke on secondary qualities has the most adherents, so I need to say less about it. This dispositional interpretation trades upon Locke’s remark that, “2ndly, such qualities, are nothing in the objects themselves, but powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities. . . . These I call secondary qualities.” Locke’s description of secondary qualities as “powers” throughout this chapter of the Essay lends credence to this interpretation.

The concept of a power or disposition has received thorough analysis because contemporary metaphysicians attempt to carry Locke’s banner. One recent example of such a thesis about secondary qualities comes from Janet Levin. She says, “Lockean dispositionalism about color, as I will understand it, is the view that the colors of objects are dispositions of their surfaces to produce perceptions of certain sorts, under standard conditions, in normal perceivers.” This is distinct from the second interpretation of secondary qualities according to which secondary qualities are the effects of physical properties of objects. It also differs from the first construal, on which secondary qualities are physical or microphysical properties of objects. According to a dispositional reading of Locke, secondary

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4 *Essay*, II.viii.18, 138; Locke’s emphasis.
6 Ibid., 465.
8 *Essay*, II.viii.10, 135.
qualities are a special type of property describable as a state of affairs, namely: were an object \( O \) to produce sensation \( S \) in conditions \( C \) for person \( P \), \( O \) would possess a secondary quality \( Q \).

Locke’s multiply interpretable discussion of secondary qualities forms the backdrop for Reid’s entrance into the debate.

## 2. Two Problems for Reid from Locke

There are two axes on which these interpretations differ about how we apprehend qualities, and about the nature of secondary qualities themselves. This leaves two corresponding problems for Reid.

The first concerns the distinction between sensation and perception. On the traditional, dispositional interpretation of Locke on secondary qualities, secondary qualities are dispositions to cause ideas in us. But these ideas are under-described since secondary qualities frequently cause two different mental states in perceivers—a qualitative state and a propositional attitude. About this Reid says that Locke “thought it necessary to introduce the Theory of Ideas, to explain the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and by that means, as I think, perplexed and darkened it” (E 317a/B 207).

Reid illustrates this confusion with an example. When I smell a rose, there are psychological phenomena meriting explanation. The perceiver possesses a mental state that has intentional and propositional content, which for Reid is a perception. Yet there is also a qualitative mental event the perceiver experiences, a sensation. This complex event of smelling the rose—an event that includes perceptual and sensory components—is caused by certain physical qualities of the rose:

The object of my perception, in this case, is that quality in the rose which I discern by the sense of smell. Observing that the agreeable sensation is raised when the rose is near, and ceases when it is removed, I am led, by my nature, to conclude some quality to be in the rose, which is the cause of this sensation. This quality in the rose is the object perceived; and that act of my mind by which I have the conviction and belief of this quality, is what in this case I call perception. . . . (E 310a–b/B 194)

Our relation to the rose and its qualities is two-fold: we can perceive the rose (or a quality of the rose), and we can sense (have a sensation of) the rose or its qualities. Locke spoke of ideas and did not explicitly employ a distinction between sensation and perception. Where Locke did not clarify the two-fold effect of sensing a rose, Reid did.

From Reid’s point of view, the second deficiency in Locke’s distinction concerns the nature of dispositional relations. A dispositional view of secondary qualities will identify them with our sensory (not perceptual) relation to qualities of objects. Reid is aware of some oblique motivations for this view. He recognizes a syntactic relationship between sensation terms and secondary quality terms. To complete the previous quotation about the rose, he adds, “. . . But it is here to be
observed, that the sensation I feel, and the quality in the rose which I perceive, are both called by the same name” (E 310b/B 194). Nonetheless, Reid believes there is both a specific and a principled problem with Locke’s view on the dispositional interpretation.

Though there is a systematic relation between certain properties of physical objects and certain properties of our mental lives, Reid does not believe this explains secondary qualities. As we have seen, Reid criticizes Hume’s parallel appeal to associative relations on these grounds, saying:

If a philosopher should undertake to account for the force of gunpowder in the discharge of a musket, and then tell us gravely that the cause of this phaenomenon is the drawing of the trigger, we should not be much wiser by this account. As little are we instructed in the cause of memory, by being told that it is caused by a certain impression on the brain. For, supposing that impression on the brain were as necessary to memory as the drawing of the trigger is to the discharge of the musket, we are still as ignorant as we were how memory is produced; so that, if the cause of memory, assigned by this theory, did really exist, it does not in any degree account for memory. (E 354a/B 281)

Observing that certain qualities in objects regularly cause certain mental events is platitudinous, and neither illuminates the nature of those qualities nor explains how to bridge the chasm between the mental and physical worlds. Likewise, to stipulate that secondary qualities are relations between certain physical qualities and mental events is to avoid giving a philosophical explanation of secondary qualities. Reid knew that a dispositional account was one legitimate interpretation of Locke on secondary qualities, but he thinks this marks a return to medi eval explanatory practices. (This is not to say that Reid thinks there are no disposi tional properties; rather, discovering that certain properties are dispositional does not illuminate our understanding of them.)

This point requires Reid to shift the nature of the debate from metaphysics to epistemology, which marks a thoroughly contemporary meta-philosophical tendency in Reid’s work. In the context of criticizing Locke, Reid says, “The account I have given of this distinction is founded upon no hypothesis. Whether our notions of primary qualities are direct and distinct, those of the secondary relative and obscure, is a matter of fact, of which every man may have certain knowledge by attentive reflection upon them” (E 314b/B 202–3). (By “hypothesis,” Reid is at least referring to Locke’s adoption of the Theory of Ideas, if not also to his corpuscularianism.) Instead of focusing on what qualities are, Reid attends to our notions of what qualities are.

3. Notions of Primary Qualities

Reid sees two philosophically important ways to distinguish our notions of secondary and primary qualities. Our notions of qualities differ (i) in the means by which they are formed, and (ii) in their content. We will first examine how Reid believes our notions of qualities can be distinguished by their formation.

The following passage marks Reid’s most explicit statement about the distinction between primary and secondary qualities:

I answer, That there appears to be a real foundation for the distinction; and it is this—that our senses give us a direct and a distinct notion of the primary qualities, and inform us what they are in themselves. But of the secondary qualities, our senses give us only a rela
tive and obscure notion. They inform us only, that they are qualities that affect us in a certain manner—that is, produce in us a certain sensation; but as to what they are in themselves, our senses leave us in the dark. (E 313b/B 201)

Using this passage we can move from the ground up by investigating the ways our notions of primary and secondary qualities differ.

Our notions of both primary and secondary qualities are cued by sensations. Reid describes the process of the movement from inputs to the nervous system to certain sensations and onward to contentful mental states. He follows Berkeley by dubbing this the process of *suggestion*. Suggestion relations are non-inferential, quasi-causal relations for Berkeley. He says, “To perceive is one thing; to judge is another. So likewise, to be suggested is one thing, and to be inferred another. Things are suggested and perceived by sense. We make judgments and inferences by the understanding.” Berkeley adds in the *New Theory* that because of the relations between sensations and perceptual beliefs, “there has grown an habitual or customary connexion between those two sorts of ideas. . . .” As an idealist, the cause and effect that are bound together by suggestion are different for Berkeley than for Reid, but there are obvious and important similarities.

Reid says, of the transfer from sensations to judgments, that this is occasioned either by inferences or by what he calls “judgments of nature.” With Locke’s definition of knowledge in Book IV clearly in mind, Reid describes these as “judgments not got by comparing ideas, and perceiving agreements and disagreements, but immediately inspired by our constitution” (I 110b; B 37). This makes it seem as though suggestion serves some type of epistemic function. But elsewhere in this same passage Reid indicates that his use of the suggestion relation is intended to account for the origins of our perceptual concepts, not our perceptual knowledge. Reid puts suggestion to this use because (i) he repudiates resemblance as serving any explanatory role in a theory of perception, and (ii) he concurs with Berkeley that the process whereby we move from sensation to perception is not cognitive. According to Descartes, the impoverished qualitative content of sensations is only capable of generating the rich content of perceptual states in virtue of a highly cognitive step between them, a step which he posits. But Berkeley, and Reid after him, believe that the process is not cognitive in this way, but is instead much more natural and automatic.

Thus they claim that a suggestion relation, not a process of reasoning, bridges the gap between our perceptual experience and our perceptual contents. Reid says that “we owe many of our simple notions which are neither impressions nor ideas, as well as many original principles of belief” to suggestion. When we hear a certain sound we immediately call to mind the notion of a coach passing by, but

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13 To simplify, we can consider the suggestion relation causal in nature, where the cause is an input into our sensory systems and the effect is a sensation. For Reid’s most explicit discussion of suggestion, see I 110–1; B 36–8. For further treatment of Reid’s theory of suggestion and its similarity with Berkeley’s, see Ronald Beanblossom, “In Defense of Thomas Reid’s Use of ‘Suggestion,’” *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 1 (1975): 19–24 and Aaron Ben Zeev, “Reexamining Berkeley’s Notion of Suggestion,” *Conceptus* 25 (1989): 21–30.
there is not "the least similitude between the sound we hear and the coach we imagine and believe to be passing" (I 111a/B 38).

Reid emphasizes that it is only in the case of primary qualities that sensations suggest qualities without themselves being objects of conscious apprehension. "When a primary quality is perceived," says Reid, "the sensation immediately leads our thought to the quality signified by it, and is itself forgot" (E 315b/B 204). Sensations do not impugn the directness of our perception of primary qualities. Our sensations "immediately" lead our minds onward to notions of primary qualities, which contrasts with the formation of our notions of secondary qualities. More formally, P’s notion of quality Q is a notion of a primary quality only if P apprehends Q and no intermediary is necessarily apprehended in the process.

Unlike the formation of the notion of sphericity, a primary quality, the formation of the notion of the smell of a bowling ball, for example, proceeds through an intermediating step. In order to form the notion of a ball’s smell, ceteris paribus, we must attend to the sensation—the sensory experience—that properties of the ball suggest to my mind through my olfactory system. There is a correlation between our notions of secondary qualities and our experiences of certain sensations. I need not feel the bowling ball in my hands in order to possess the notion of sphericity. In contrast, in the actual world (a qualification to which we will return), the causal sequence resulting in notions of secondary qualities like smells must have, at some point, proceeded through a conscious awareness or perception of a sensation. Notions of secondary qualities are indirect in that sense.

The foregoing marks how notions of primary qualities are direct, by Reid’s lights. While directness concerns the formation of our concepts of qualities, Reid also argues that the contents of our conceptions of primary and secondary qualities differ in crucial respects, which marks the second means by which Reid draws his distinction. (For present purposes I am taking the notions of forming concepts and acquiring contents through perception as primitive, though I have elsewhere analyzed these notions as they appear in Reid.14) The contents of notions of primary qualities bear two traits that notions of secondary qualities lack: clarity and distinctness.

Reid says that notions of primary qualities are distinct, but he does not explain distinctness in the context of his discussion of qualities. Furthermore, studying Reid’s discussion of simple apprehension, where distinctness also plays an important role, does not shed much light on this notion (E 366–7/B 306–9). He may have a Cartesian notion of distinctness in mind according to which it refers to the way one apprehends a quality by distinguishing it from its surroundings and isolating it in one’s mind.15 In any case, Reid says that the distinctness of our notions


15 In the Principles, Descartes says, “I call a perception ‘distinct’ if, as well as being clear, the perception is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear” (Principles of Philosophy, in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, trans. [New York: Cambridge, 1985], pt. I, sect. 45, 207–8). The cogito conforms to this requirement, but the statement “I have a pain in my foot” does not. Reid concurs with Descartes when Descartes says that the sensation of pain is clear and not distinct because “people commonly confuse this perception with an obscure judgement they make concerning the nature of something which they think exists in the painful spot and which they suppose to resemble the sensation of pain” (Ibld., sect. 46, 208).
of primary qualities “enables us to reason demonstratively about them to a great extent” (E 315a/B 203).

Clarity, not distinctness, is the more important means by which the contents of our notions of qualities differ. Reid explains that when a notion of some quality is clear, then “the thing itself we understand perfectly” (E 314a/B 201). He continues, “It is evident, therefore, that of the primary qualities we have a clear and distinct notion; we know what they are, though we may be ignorant of their causes” (E 314a/B 201). (I will not speculate on the strength of this epistemic relation other than to say that it seems to imply incorrigibility.)

Though Reid focuses on the content of our notions, he does not create a framework for capturing the different degrees of clarity with precision. I will refer to our notions of primary qualities as notions of the essential natures of the qualities, though by that I only mean what Reid does by saying that those notions are of qualities as they are “in themselves.” Essential natures contrast with what I will refer to as the scientific natures, i.e., microphysical structures, of qualities. Importantly, essential and scientific natures are physical in character, though they operate at different levels of analysis. Reid says hardness is the cohesion of the parts of a body, specifying its essential nature, but to specify its scientific nature we must say something about the density of molecules in the body. We shall see, with respect to secondary qualities, that our concepts capture neither their essential natures nor their scientific natures.

One way to develop this notion of clarity is by examining Reid’s description of what he calls “manifest” qualities in the Intellectual Powers against the backdrop of what I am dubbing “essential natures.” At the highest order of classification, Reid distinguishes qualities as being either manifest (apparent to the senses) or occult (occluded from the senses). Primary qualities are a species of manifest qualities, while secondary qualities are a species of occult qualities. One defining characteristic of this distinction, a characteristic that also differentiates secondary from primary qualities, is that the “nature of [primary qualities] is manifest even to sense . . . ” (E 322a/B 217). According to Reid, hardness, a primary quality, is a high degree of cohesion of the parts of a body. While that describes the essential nature of hardness, it leaves the scientific nature of the physical bonds between parts of bodies open to discovery by science. He says, “the business of the philosopher with regard to [manifest qualities], is not to find out their nature, which is well known, but to discover the effects produced by their various combinations” (E 322a/B 217). In other words, the realm of further research on primary qualities lies in their empirical, scientific analysis. In contrast, an occult quality is one whose existence is, but whose nature is not, apparent to us through sense perception. Neither the essential nor the scientific nature of occult qualities is apparent to us via unaided sense perception. By Reid’s use of ‘nature’ in these passages, he does not refer to the physical or microphysical constitution of the quality, but rather to the essential nature of the quality.

In contrast to primary qualities, the essential nature of color is occluded from us; by forming notions of colors from experience we do not thereby know of what their essential natures consist. The fact that we have clear notions of primary qualities indicates that the essential natures of those qualities are manifest and
obvious to us through our senses. “Every man capable of reflection may easily satisfy himself that he has a perfectly clear and distinct notion of extension, divisibility, figure, and motion” (E 314a/B 201).

For the record, in the Inquiry Reid enumerates extension, figure, motion, hardness and softness, and roughness and smoothness as primary qualities (I 123a–b/B 62). In the Intellectual Powers he describes Locke’s primary qualities as including “extension, divisibility, figure, motion, solidity, hardness, softness and fluidity” (E 313b/B 201). Locke might not endorse this list for it substitutes motion for mobility and divisibility for number, not to mention that it includes some qualities Locke does not (namely hardness, softness, and fluidity). Reid proceeds to discuss this latter list as though it marked his own distinction, but its differences with the Inquiry are obvious, and I will take them as unimportant for present purposes.

Thus we come to a second necessary condition on the conception of primary qualities: P’s notion of Q at t is clear only if, of Q’s essential nature E, P knows that E is the essential nature of Q. Reid does not perfectly understand the essential nature of blue, for example, so his notion of blue is not clear. Thus, blue is not a primary quality for Reid.

4. NOTIONS OF SECONDARY QUALITIES

Since our notions of primary qualities are more direct and clear than our notions of secondary qualities, it is no surprise that Reid largely defines secondary qualities in contrasting terms. As in section 3, I will examine first the formation then the content of, in this case, notions of secondary qualities.

Our notions of secondary qualities are “relative” and “occult.” He explains, “To call a thing occult, if we attend to the meaning of the word, is rather modestly to confess ignorance, than to cloak it” (E 321b/B 216). With that in the open, I will nonetheless attempt to explain Reid’s analysis of our notions of secondary qualities.

Sensations of secondary qualities are distracting and forceful in ways that sensations of primary qualities typically are not. When I smell an apple pie in the oven, I mentally attend to the olfactory sensation. This is not to deny that the sensation signifies something. It does (an apple pie) and Reid knows that; rather, the smell itself is an object of immediate attention in the way that the sensations of pressure on the keys of a computer are not. So the formation of our notions of secondary qualities is mediated by apprehension of sensations, i.e., such notions are not formed directly.

Reid turns to the linguistic behavior of secondary quality terms to describe another difference with primary qualities. This close relationship between sensation and secondary quality obviously coheres with our ordinary, ambiguous use of terms like ‘smell’ and ‘taste.’ Terms like ‘smell’ are ambiguous since they can refer to sensations and to properties of physical objects. However, Reid treats terms

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for colors as exceptional, though there is some disagreement on this point. He says, for example, “That idea which we have called the appearance of colour, suggests the conception and belief of some unknown quality in the body, which occasions the idea; and it is to this quality, and not to the idea, that we give the name of colour” (I 137b–138a/B 86; cf. 137a/B 85 and I 142b/B 95). 17

Because of the ties between sensations and secondary qualities, the contents of our notions of secondary qualities are only of unknown causes of sensations, and not of essential natures of qualities. Echoing Berkeley, Reid gives voice to this stark contrast between our concepts of secondary and primary qualities:

The sensations of heat and cold are perfectly known; for they neither are, nor can be, anything else than what we feel them to be; but the qualities in bodies which we call heat and cold, are unknown. They are only conceived by us, as unknown causes or occasions of the sensations to which we give the same names. (I 119b/B 54)

According to Reid, the “very essence of [a sensation] consists in its being felt” (E 289b/B 156). In his correspondence with Hume, Reid is yet more explicit: “I can attend to what I feel, and the sensation is nothing else, nor has any other qualities than what I feel it to have. Its esse is sentiri, and nothing can be in it that is not felt”

17 J. C. Smith (“Reid and the Contemporary View of Consciousness,” in Historical Foundations of Cognitive Science, J. C. Smith, ed. [Dordrect: Kluwer, 1996], 139–59) does not think that there is a difference; he thinks that color terms are also ambiguous in Reid (141). Anthony Pitson (“Reid on Primary and Secondary Qualities,” Reid Studies 5 [2001]: 17–34) agrees that they are “ambiguous” (18, but at 20–1 Pitson also says that, for Reid, “the term ‘colour’ never refers to the perceptual experience associated with our awareness of the quality itself”). In contrast, Lorne Falkenstein (“Reid’s Account of Localization,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 61 [2000]: 305–28) claims, rightly by my lights, that Reidian color terms refer only to the physical causes of qualitative experiences (322; cf. 319).

18 Falkenstein believes that this feature of Reid’s theory—that color terms primarily refer to sensory qualities—necessitates a misleading semantics. This “sits uncomfortably with natural assumptions about the origin and use of words.” “Reid is wrong,” he says, “about what people mean when they use colour terms . . .” (Falkenstein, op. cit., 314, 325). Falkenstein is correct to think that something is amiss in Reid’s semantics for color terms, but it can be accounted for by identifying two of Reid’s motivations. We can understand Reid’s penchant for wanting to put secondary qualities back into the world in light of the Theory of Ideas, which was prone to locate qualities exclusively in the mind. Reid says:

Des Cartes, Malebranche, and Locke . . . made the secondary qualities mere sensations, and the primary ones resemblances of our sensations. They maintained, that colour, sound, and heat, are not any thing in bodies, but sensations of the mind: at the same time, they acknowledged some particular texture or modification of the body, to be the cause or occasion of those sensations; but to this modification they gave no name. (I 131a; B 73)

Ideal theorists were convinced that we only directly perceived ideas when, according to Reid, we directly perceive mind-independent objects and qualities. Hence, Reid has principled reason to reject any heavy-handed demand to accommodate ordinary language in this particular dialectic.

Reid is also motivated to adopt his semantics for color terms by philosophical concerns. There is something normative about our use of color terms, and this cannot be accounted for by appeal to ordinary language. We say things like “roses are red.” This implicitly presupposes that we are not talking about our visual experiences themselves. This statement is not falsified, Reid argues, when I see a red rose (i.e., a rose whose color is red in standard conditions) through green glasses and it appears a different color to me (I 137a–b; B 83). The fact that our experience of color varies so systematically with lighting conditions is evidence not that colors are nothing more than mind-dependent sense-data, but that there are important features of color that are mind-independent and that elude our simple visual experience. For these two reasons Reid is at least partially exonerated from Falkenstein’s criticism.
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We have no knowledge of the scientific nature of secondary qualities because we only conceive of them "as unknown causes."

Now we see what Reid means by dubbing notions of secondary qualities "relative." Our notions of secondary qualities are relational only, and are not wholly constituted by intrinsic qualitative mental states. Because secondary qualities are not sense-data, for Reid, we can have a notion of the smell of a rose without being privy to the essential nature of the smell of the rose, let alone its scientific nature. (Note that our notions, not the qualities themselves, are relational in this sense.)

He says:

The quality in the rose is something which occasions the sensation in me; but what that something is, I know not. My senses give me no information upon this point. The only notion, therefore, my senses give is this—that smell in the rose is an unknown quality or modification, which is the cause or occasion of a sensation which I know well. The relation which this unknown quality bears to the sensation with which nature hath connected it, is all I learn from the sense of smelling; but this is evidently a relative notion. The same reasoning will apply to every secondary quality. (E 314b/B 202)

From my sense of smelling I only learn that physical qualities in objects bear a causal relation to olfactory sensations, and nothing about the particular physical qualities involved.

The relationship between secondary qualities and sensations is contingent. God has conjoined certain sensations with certain physical qualities in objects (or in our bodies) for the benefit of our survival (E 311b–312a/B 196–8). God could have matched different sensations with these qualities than he actually has. Reid is diffident about ruling upon the contingency of relations between secondary qualities and sensations, saying that the fact that "these two ingredients are necessarily connected, is, perhaps, difficult for us to determine, there being many necessary connections which we do not perceive to be necessary; but we can disjoin them in thought" (E 311b/B 196). In contrast to the relationship between sensations and primary qualities, there are no physically necessary connections between any secondary quality and its corresponding sensation. In abnormal environments or when perceivers are malfunctioning, says Reid, the connection lapses, as in phantom limb pain (E 320b/B 214). So the causal connection between secondary qualities and sensations is contingent.

In addition to the traditional secondary qualities Reid inherits from Locke, he adduces a few new examples that aid in spelling out his view. Reid places gravity, the quality in bodies that attracts one to another, among the secondary qualities (E 314a/B 201–2). We only directly observe gravity's effects on bodies so our notion of gravity depends upon notions produced by observing the attraction of bodies. Our notion of gravity, as opposed to the correlation between this unknown quality and certain effects, is not direct or clear. (Reid also discusses magnetism in this vein in the Inquiry to make largely the same points; see I 113–4/B 40–3.)

5. DISPOSITIONS AND SECONDARY QUALITIES

What I have said about our notions of secondary qualities is for the most part neutral with respect to the actual constitution of secondary qualities. In order to clarify this matter, we need to determine whether Reidian secondary qualities are
dispositions or the physical bases of those dispositions. (We are already resolved on the basis of the above texts that Reidian secondary qualities are not sensations.) A strong textual case can be mounted on behalf of the view that secondary qualities are physical properties of objects.

First of all, what is a dispositional quality? Paradigmatically, solubility in water is a dispositional quality such that, were an object that possesses (this form of) solubility submerged in water, it would dissolve. Dispositional qualities are generally specified by counterfactual conditionals. The reason so much confusion surrounds analysis of dispositional qualities is that their ontological status is left unresolved. For materialists, dispositional qualities will be identical to or supervene on physical or micro-physical qualities of objects. The quality of being soluble in water may supervene on molecules capable of bonding with H\textsubscript{2}O.

This slack between dispositional qualities and their physical base properties complicates my task of showing that Reid is not a dispositionalist about secondary qualities. Someone who thinks that there is some type of regular causal connection between physical qualities and sensations is not, on those grounds alone, a dispositionalist about secondary qualities. What is required for dispositionalism, we can call it, is the identification of a quality with a set of counterfactual conditions. Of course, Reid does not speak in those terms, so if we have evidence that secondary qualities are identical to something like a “potentiality” in bodies, this will approximate a commitment to dispositionalism.

In support of such an interpretation, Nichols Wolterstorff says this of Reid: “In the Inquiry he says, for example, that color “is a certain power or virtue in bodies” (VI, iv [138a; B 87]; cf. II, ix [114a; B 43]), whereas in the Essays he says that “smell in the rose is an unknown quality or modification” in the rose (II, xvii [314b]; cf. Inquiry V, I [119b; B 54]).” Clearly the phrase “is a certain power” is bothersome for my interpretation of Reid according to which secondary qualities are physical properties of bodies.

However, three textual problems thwart the use of this passage to attribute dispositionalism to Reid. First, Reid makes the same point in the Inquiry that Wolterstorff goes all the way to the Intellectual Powers to draw, namely that color is an unknown quality. In fact, Reid makes this point on the very page in the Inquiry from which Wolterstorff draws his evidence for dispositionalism:

\[\text{The name of colour belongs indeed to the cause only, and not to the effect. But, as the cause is unknown, we can form no distinct conception of it but by its relation to the known effect. . . . Hence the appearance [of the color scarlet] is, in the imagination, so closely united with the quality called a scarlet-colour, that they are apt to be mistaken for one and the same thing, although they are in reality so different and so unlike, that one is an idea in the mind, the other is a quality of body. (I 138a/B 86–7, final emphasis mine)}\]

This undermines Wolterstorff’s contrast between Reid’s works.

This troublesome passage Wolterstorff cites occurs in Inquiry, VI, 4, which Reid titles “That colour is a quality of bodies, not a sensation of the mind.” This title, and the contrast it invokes, is evidence against a dispositional interpretation on its most straightforward reading, which is the second textual criticism. Less than a page later, in VI, 5, Reid says that what others regard as “one of the most remark-
able paradoxes of modern philosophy,” namely that color is not a quality of bodies, is “nothing else but an abuse of words.” Color is “a permanent quality of body” (I 138b/B 87). He adds, “We have shewn, that there is really a permanent quality of body, to which the common use of this word exactly agrees” (I 138b–139a/B 88). Experiences of colors, tastes, and smells are not, properly speaking, secondary qualities; those mark the exemplifications of relations between secondary qualities and our minds. The Intellectual Powers confirms this attribution. For example, there Reid says, “We have no reason to think that any of the secondary qualities resemble any sensation. . . . It is too evident to need proof, that the vibrations of a sounding body do not resemble the sensation of sound, nor the effluvia of an odorous body the sensation of smell” (E 314b/B 203). In this case the secondary quality causing sensations of smell is explicitly identified with effluvia, i.e., minute, airborne, physical particles. These textual reasons favor identifying secondary qualities with brute physical qualities, not dispositions.

Third, when Reid does say in the Inquiry that colors are powers, we must not forget that colors are special among other secondary qualities because the terms we use to refer to them are ambiguous to a greater extent than are other terms for secondary qualities. This is in part attributable to the way Locke and his followers put the philosophical problem, whose “question was,” according to Reid, “whether to give the name of colour to the cause or to the effect? By giving it, as they have done, to the effect, they set philosophy apparently in opposition to common sense . . . ” (I 140a/B 90). Reid is not immune to occasional lapses into this same linguistic confusion. Perhaps that is the best means of accounting for the retraction (that color “is a certain power”) upon which Wolterstorff alights.

In addition, for Reid there are two philosophical reasons against dispositionalism. I presented the first above (in section 2) when I argued that Reid has a principled objection to dispositional analyses like Locke’s. Reid thinks such analyses are philosophically unilluminating; thus Reid would not be likely to offer such an analysis of secondary qualities himself.

Secondly, Reid’s description of our epistemic relation to secondary qualities contrasts sharply with what we would expect on a dispositional view. According to Reid, our notions of items like green are not clear. On that basis Reid repudiates having knowledge of what the quality green is, other than repeating that it is the unknown cause of a known effect. Secondary qualities are conceived “only as the unknown causes or occasions of certain sensations” (E 314b/B 202). If secondary qualities were merely dispositions and not the physical bases of these dispositions, Reid’s frequent claims to the effect that he does not know what secondary qualities are would be nonsensical.20

My argument here assumes that there is something about dispositional qualities that makes it likely that we know that a quality is dispositional when it is dispositional. Solubility, one might argue, provides a counterexample to this assumption. I may work with salt for an indefinite amount of time and fail to apprehend

20 Wolterstorff himself recognizes the difficulty this point presents for his analysis. He highlights the fact that, if secondary qualities were dispositions, then they would be known in a fairly obvious way. “If green were a disposition in things,” he says, “we would know what it was.” He takes this as inconclusive evidence against his reading (112).
that it possesses solubility. If this is correct, then describing our epistemic relation to secondary qualities as transparent in the way I have just done is in error. Hence, Reidian secondary qualities might be dispositional qualities. (I thank George Pappas for bringing this objection to my attention.)

However, due to a disanalogy between solubility and secondary qualities like green and heat, this criticism fails. In the secondary quality case, Reid is acquainted with a physical object and the effects that certain qualities of that object produce. Those effects are on our minds, not on a physical substance. Physical qualities of objects produce sensation experiences, qualitative mental states, in us. I alleged that Reid is not a dispositionalist because he claims ignorance about the nature of secondary qualities of whose sensory effects he is regularly and constantly aware. Unlike solubility, the content needed to fill the counterfactual conditional is right at hand. If secondary qualities are dispositional, then green is identical with the following state of affairs: were a green surface brought into my visual field, I would experience a sensation of green. To know what green is does not require knowledge of what its physical base is since to be green is to be specified by a counterfactual conditional like this. When a perceiver is functioning properly (as Reid requires at E 328b/B 229), the perceiver’s knowledge of what green is will be implied by a dispositional account of colors. Hence we are warranted in adding the following necessary condition to our analysis of Reid’s secondary qualities, viz. Q is a physical quality of objects.

6. AN ANALYSIS

Though Reid does not intend to give us a conceptual analysis of primary and secondary qualities, the conditions we have described in the preceding two sections bring us near necessary and sufficient conditions for our notions of qualities. In the interest of prudence, however, I will stop short of claiming that these conditions are jointly sufficient. Collecting from what has come before we arrive at the following approximation for primary qualities:

Q is a primary quality for P at t only if (i) P acquires the notion of the essential nature E of Q without any intermediary necessarily apprehended in the process; and (ii) P knows that the E is essential nature of Q.

As for secondary qualities, we can state Reid’s conditions in contrasting terms:

Q is a secondary quality for P only if (i) P’s notion of Q is mediated by apprehension of sensations; (ii) P’s notion of Q is only of unknown causes of sensations and not of essential or scientific natures; (iii) the causal connection between Q and sensations is contingent; and (iv) Q is a non-dispositional physical quality of bodies.

This analysis flows from the texts we have examined, though Reid might well deny that, with it, he has given a philosophical analysis of qualities. If this is correct, then prior characterizations of Reid’s distinction—many of which have been drawn from his aesthetics21—must be revised.

21 Remarkably opposed interpretations of his analysis of aesthetic qualities have arisen, which include: (i) that aesthetic qualities are secondary qualities, and that Reid mistakenly compares aesthetic
In the remaining sections I will clarify some aspects of this account. In doing so we will be able to respond to a number of objections to it.

7. THE RELATIVITY OF REIDIAN QUALITIES

There is an important sense in which, on Reid’s distinction, primary and secondary qualities are relative to agents. Keith Lehrer does not think that this feature benefits the account. He says, “We may agree with Reid that we have a clear and distinct conception of primary qualities, but do we not also have a clear and distinct conception of some secondary qualities?” Clear and distinct notions of all qualities are caused by sensations. Hence, Lehrer says, “the distinction between primary and secondary qualities collapses because both are ultimately based on sensation.”

Lehrer’s remark that both notions of primary and secondary qualities are “ultimately” based on sensations is incorrect on its most obvious reading, for Reid believes we can form concepts of primary qualities without those primary qualities causing sensations in us. In contrast to our notions of secondary qualities, experiencing a sensation caused by a primary quality is not a necessary condition on forming a notion of that quality. This has been argued forcefully by Keith DeRose.

Of course, the critic might revise Lehrer’s point to argue that, even if both sets of notions do not depend upon sensations, Reid’s distinction may collapse in another way. Consider, for example, that Reid takes the inebriating quality of wine to be a secondary quality (E 315a/B 204). We now know the scientific nature of this quality—the molecular composition of alcohol—and how it destabilizes certain brain processes. The critic could argue that, on Reid’s account, the inebriating quality of wine is a secondary quality, and is not a secondary quality since we know its scientific nature. The critic could conclude that the concept of a Reidian secondary quality is incoherent.

But, if I may be so bold, this result—that qualities might be relative to agents—is part of Reid’s theory and not a problem with it. We have seen above that Reid describes secondary qualities as “relative,” but the relativity of qualities is not as radical as one might think. My notion of the microphysical, scientific nature of alcohol is not direct or clear since it is based on the testimony of chemists. So for qualities to primary qualities, given by Peter Kivy (“Lectures on the Fine Arts: an unpublished manuscript of Thomas Reid’s,” Journal of the History of Ideas 31 (1970): 17–32); (ii) that aesthetic qualities are primary qualities and secondary qualities, and that Reid’s aesthetics is rendered incoherent as a result, given by Theodore Gracyk (“The Failure of Thomas Reid’s Aesthetics,” Monist 70 (1987): 465–82); (iii) that aesthetic qualities are neither primary nor secondary qualities, though Reid mistakenly indicates otherwise, given by Josefine Nauckhoff (“Objectivity and Expression in Thomas Reid’s Aesthetics,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 52 (1994): 183–91); and most recently, (iv) that aesthetic qualities bear features of both secondary and primary qualities, given by Hagit Benbaji (“Reid’s View of Aesthetic and Secondary Qualities,” Reid Studies 3 (2000): 31–46). On (iv), aesthetic qualities are like secondary qualities because both are dispositional, while they are like primary qualities because there is an incorrigibility about our judgments of them. But none of these positions begins from a considered account of Reid’s views on the perceptual and epistemological status of qualities. In the most recent interpretation, Benbaji’s view implies that Reid systematically “confuses the [secondary] quality with its ground” (41).

the quality in wine that causes inebriation is quite clearly a secondary quality. Is
the chemist’s notion of the same quality a notion of a primary quality? The chemist’s
notion of the inebriating quality is neither direct nor, on Reid’s use of the term,
clear. So it too is a notion of a secondary quality. In this way Reid’s analysis of
secondary qualities shows that for chemist and connoisseur alike the notion of
the inebriating quality of wine is a notion of a secondary quality. Reid’s distinction
does not make qualities relative to agents; at least it does not in the actual world.

On the basis of this point, though, we can build a more fanciful case that makes
clear the way in which secondary qualities can in principle become primary quali-
ties (and vice versa). Imagine a creature who forms a direct and clear notion of
the scientific nature of the inebriating quality of wine (i.e., of the composition
of alcohol) merely on the basis of the sensation of tasting wine. Perhaps his taste
buds process high degrees of information about the scientific natures of substances
he imbibes. This would resemble the manner in which our fingertips inform us of
the essential nature of hardness (the strong cohesion of the parts of a body) upon
touching a wall. For this creature the inebriating quality in wine is a primary qual-
ity because, on the basis of his sensory experiences (and not empirical, scientific
investigation), he forms notions of the essential and scientific natures of alcohol.
Reid’s analysis allows that these states of affairs are possible, which is as it should
be. A traditional distinction drawn on purely metaphysical lines would not be able
to deal with such cases as smoothly.

To put this point generally, a body’s having a certain primary or secondary
quality is contingent and indexed to certain perceivers at certain times. Lehrer is
correct to insinuate that the difference between a primary and secondary quality
will “collapse”—at least in some possible worlds. However, this does not imply that
the distinction is false or otiose in our world. Moreover, it seems that this sense of
‘collapse’ would not sap Reid’s account of its explanatory power; further argu-
ment is needed for that conclusion. In fact, this versatility in Reid’s distinction
captures the radically different means by which we relate to these two types of
qualities without assuming either that all perceivers are properly functioning hu-
mans, that God had to design us as he has, or that the perceptual systems of hu-
mans could not evolve.

8. PHENOMENOLOGY OF REIDIAN SECONDARY QUALITIES

Falkenstein believes that Reid’s analysis of secondary qualities—specifically, of
colors—fails to account for features of our experience. He says, “Once Reid’s
peculiar use of the term ‘colour’ is exposed, it is hard not to conclude that his
position does not reflect what we think we see.” (This is distinct from his ordinary
language objection to Reidian secondary qualities mentioned in note 17.) He
adds:

the thesis that we do not experience our sensations of colour to be located on the visual
field or compounded into extended and shaped aggregates is not even so much as uncertain
or possible; it is false. Reid is wrong, both about what people mean when they use
colour terms and about how they experience the sensations that coloured objects produce
in their minds.
Falkenstein indicates that we “see visible figures to be filled out with the sensations of colour that objects cause in the mind.” The problem is that “Colours, understood as the hidden qualities in objects that cause our sensations of colour are hidden—not actually seen, but only inferred.” But colors are in point of fact revealed to us through our sensations of them, urges Falkenstein. So Reid’s account of color fails to accommodate the phenomenology of color vision.24

Antony Pitson has already successfully addressed this objection as voiced against Reid (even though he does not address Falkenstein’s own presentation of it), and I do not propose to better his analysis and refutation of this objection here. Pitson identifies what he calls the Revelation Thesis (to which Reid is opposed) as the claim that the “intrinsic nature of colours is revealed by ordinary visual experience.” This thesis is best understood as an epistemic claim. It comes in two forms. The strong form of the Revelation Thesis states that “the nature of colour as a quality is revealed in ordinary visual experience,” while the weak version states that “merely looking at something is sufficient for determining its colour.”25 If I understand Falkenstein’s discussion he seems to affirm both, and he surely affirms the weaker thesis.

Pitson argues that the strong version is false, and so Reid cannot be criticized on the grounds that his view is inconsistent with it. On the strong thesis, colors are nothing more than sensations, qualitative mental episodes. But this does not account for the objectivity of our experience of color. Pitson argues that “we have to distinguish between the fixed colour of the object as a quality of the object itself, and the various colours it may appear to be under different circumstances.”26 This alone seems conclusive against the strong thesis.

He then argues that the weaker thesis is false. Reid thinks that terms like ‘scarlet’ refer to physical causes of qualitative events, but let us grant the objector that ‘scarlet’ always refers to the qualitative experience caused by some physical property. Even if this were the case, it will not follow that I can identify the color of the object of vision by looking at it. This is the point of Reid’s example involving looking at a scarlet rose through green glasses, which makes the sensation of the scarlet rose like the sensation of a black rose. Pitson concludes that Reid’s idiosyncratic analysis of color can be defended against an objection based upon the Revelation Thesis.

I want to make one addition to Pitson’s case, which concerns a presupposition at work in appeals to the revealed knowledge of secondary qualities. Falkenstein says that people experience redness in the sense that, for example, a “triangle on their visual fields looks to be painted over its extension with . . . a mere sensation in the mind.”27 Locutions like “triangle on their visual fields” implicitly presume, contra Reid, that the perceived triangle is not the actual triangle. Suppose I am seeing a triangular red road sign bearing the word ‘Yield.’ Falkenstein seems to

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24 Falkenstein, op. cit., 322, 325, 324, 320.
26 Pitson, op. cit., 27.
27 Falkenstein, op. cit., 325.
take for granted that there is a perceived intermediary between my visual awareness and the yield sign—the visible figure of the triangle.

But according to Reid’s direct theory of visual perception, the red, visual triangle is not a reified perceptual intermediary. My point is that the weak thesis may well seem true when we presuppose with the Theory of Ideas that the object I see is a sense-datum of some sort. This intuition gives Revelation Theses their forceful, intuitive plausibility (and also a measure of ambiguity). If I am right to think that the present objection to Reid’s treatment of color is based upon the Theory of Ideas’ indirect realist account of perception, then to properly adjudicate the point one must take into account Reid’s many arguments against just such a theory of perception.

9. IMMEDIATE PERCEPTION OF SECONDARY QUALITIES

A final problem lies in determining what our perceptual and epistemic relations to secondary qualities are. When perceiving secondary qualities, the immediate object of mental awareness is a sensation, not its physical base, i.e., not the Reidian secondary quality. If the immediate object of awareness is a sensation, then it seems both that I cannot directly perceive the secondary quality and that I cannot have immediate (i.e., non-inferential) knowledge of what that sensation suggests. If this line of argument can be borne out, then Reid unwittingly bifurcates his theory of immediate perceptual knowledge. We will now explain this argument, which first involves briefly specifying the nature of, and relation between, conceptual and epistemic immediacy.

On the basis of Reid’s repeated comments that our concepts of primary qualities are “directly” formed, I construed Reid’s notion of directness in a conceptual sense: “P’s notion of primary quality Q at t is direct only if P apprehends Q, and no intermediary is necessarily apprehended in the process.” Let us call this sense of immediacy conceptual immediacy. This condition means that the direct objects of conception, as they occur within acts of perception, are external objects or qualities, not mental representations. We have seen specific forms of this thesis applied to primary qualities in texts cited above. He attests to a general type of conceptual immediacy in passages such as this:

«We shall find in [perception] these three things: First, Some conception or notion of the object perceived; Secondly, a strong and irresistible conviction and belief of its present existence; and, Thirdly, That this conviction and belief are immediate, and not the effect of reasoning. (E 258a/B 96; cf. E 326b/B 226 and I 183/B 168)»

In addition to being a formative part of his account of notions of primary qualities, this conceptual acquaintance thesis marks one crucial component in Reid’s direct theory of perception.

We might be tempted to distinguish from this a thesis of perceptual immediacy. It seems as though, for Reid, X’s being conceptually immediate is necessary for

[^28]: I have given my own account of Reid’s phenomenology of vision and of the status of visible figures and their relation to color in “Visible Figure and Reid’s Theory of Visual Perception,” forthcoming in Hume Studies 28 (2002). There I analyze Reid’s flawed attempt to wholly avoid an indirect theory of perception.
X's being perceptually immediate. This is in part because perceptual immediacy seems to include both conceptual and doxastic components. Reid says, for example, that "immediate perception is immediate and intuitive judgment" (E 420b/B 422). Perception, then, at least contains a conceptual or cognitive component (and at most requires belief). Commentators have specified the nature of Reid's perceptual immediacy thesis by adding a further necessary condition. George Pappas explains the nature of perceptual immediacy by saying that, according to Reid, "Typically we immediately perceive objects and their qualities, i.e., we perceive them without perceiving intermediaries." This is not the place to attempt to nail down Reid's notion of perceptual immediacy since, for present purposes, I will rest satisfied knowing that perceptual immediacy incorporates conceptual immediacy, as seems clear from Reid's definition of perception above.

Distinct from the conceptual and perceptual components lies an epistemic component. In fact, Reid's central purpose in arguing that we have immediate conceptual and perceptual awareness of external objects is so that he can lay claim to their epistemic immediacy. Reid prizes the immediate, non-inferential perceptual knowledge that his direct theory of perception makes possible. Thus he endorses what we can call a thesis of epistemic immediacy: perceptual knowledge is non-inferentially formed, and is not (necessarily) based on beliefs about sensations or mental representations. Reid's use of suggestion relations (see section 3 above) foreshadows this thesis. He is explicit about this epistemic sense of immediacy elsewhere though, saying for example that a perceptual belief "is immediate, that is, it is not [produced] by a train of reasoning and argumentation" (E 259b/B 99).

There are philosophical reasons for Reid to claim that epistemic immediacy also requires conceptual immediacy. If one claims that we can have non-inferential knowledge of X even though X is not the immediate object of conception, we would be puzzled indeed as to how that knowledge would be non-inferential. That is, if X is not conceptually immediate then X cannot be epistemically immediate (i.e., non-inferential), for we cannot have non-inferential knowledge of something which is not an object of immediate awareness. Often Reid claims, more strongly, that if X is not an object of immediate awareness, we can have no knowledge of it at all—whether said knowledge is non-inferential or inferential. For example, in the Inquiry's dedication Reid explains that the "sceptical system" (the Theory of Ideas) he plans to attack "leans with its whole weight upon a hypothesis . . . [t]hat nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it." In other words, the mind is aware only of mental representations. Referring to ideas, he adds, "I cannot, from their existence, infer the existence of anything else: my impressions and ideas are the only existences of which I can have any knowledge.

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30 Some may reject this "epistemic immediacy requires conceptual immediacy" thesis on the basis of the following sort of observation: we might fail to perceive an object immediately, but nonetheless be able to form a non-inferential belief about it. This, however, will only be possible for those who advocate non-epistemic accounts of perceiving. But Reid denies that there is non-epistemic perceiving since he affirms that all perceptions, including original perceptions, have conceptual content.
or conception; . . . " (I 96a/B 4). Knowledge is restricted to the immediate objects of mind.

The relations between these three theses generate a conflict between Reid’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and his claims to both direct perception and immediate perceptual knowledge. For when I conceive of secondary qualities I must conceive of an intermediary, namely the sensation or sensory experience. This is one of the central features that sets secondary qualities apart from primary qualities, by Reid’s lights. But this makes it impossible for us either to directly perceive secondary qualities, or to have non-inferential perceptual knowledge of secondary qualities. For example, the secondary quality of the smell of a rose is the physical feature of the rose that is causally responsible for my sensation, but I am only immediately aware of my sensation. To have immediate perceptual contact with the quality of the rose that produces this smell and to have immediate, non-inferential perceptual knowledge of this quality, I must first have conceptually immediate awareness of the quality.

This result will generalize for all secondary qualities: I cannot immediately perceive secondary qualities and I cannot non-inferentially know the secondary quality. Thus I can directly perceive and have immediate knowledge of primary qualities, but I cannot directly perceive and have immediate knowledge of secondary qualities. This result complicates Reid’s theory of perception.

However, there is one important point to make in Reid’s defense. Given Reid’s analysis of secondary qualities, this objection presents itself as much stranger than it is. Reid is not claiming that we cannot directly perceive our sensations. (They are not Reidian secondary qualities.) In fact, though this result does seem surprising, perhaps it is the way it should be. After all, Reid speaks of secondary qualities as “unknown” (I 119b/B 54) and “occult” (E 321b/B 216) qualities.

I O . S U M M A R Y

Understanding Reid’s distinction between secondary and primary qualities necessitates understanding the nature of his departure from Locke’s method. Reid chooses to ground his analysis in his concepts of qualities since those, as opposed to the scientific natures of qualities, he knew well. Concepts of primary qualities are clear, distinct, and direct, and bear fruit when placed in the service of science. Notions of secondary qualities lack all those features, primarily because they are dependent on our mediating apprehension of the sensations they cause in us. Reid disposes of his Lockean inheritance by taking an epistemic turn.

If this epistemic way of drawing the distinction is correct, then Reid should be seen as making a clear and radical break from Locke. Reid’s epistemic distinction can be read as a forerunner to contemporary scientific anti-realist interpretations of quantum phenomena. After all, secondary qualities are like unobservables. Reid shares with advocates of these accounts an intense devotion to empiricist

31 This feature of Reid’s philosophical method—placing priority on the epistemic—shows up in other equally fascinating ways in his corpus. For example, I have argued elsewhere (“Reid on Fictional Objects and the Way of Ideas,” The Philosophical Quarterly 52 [2002]: 582–601) that Reid commits himself to a Meinongian account of fictional objects in order to affirm a heady thesis about first-person privileged access to our mental states.
standards in metaphysics and an abhorrence of what he would deride as “hypotheses.” Given Locke’s failure to clarify the distinction on speculative metaphysical grounds, Reid’s empiricist turn should, despite the comparison just noted, retain the commonsense pedigree we rightly associate with Reid’s work.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} I thank participants at the NEH seminar on Thomas Reid, in August 2000, for discussion of this paper, at which it was circulated. I especially thank James Van Cleve for his suggestions on a much earlier draft. I also owe a debt of gratitude to George Pappas and to two referees for the Journal for their helpful comments.