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Hume Studies Volume XXI, Number 1 (April, 1995) 47-56.

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Hume and Reid on the Simplicity of the Soul

LORNE FALKENSTEIN

In Book I Part iv Section 5 of *A Treatise of Human Nature*,¹ David Hume launched a sceptical attack on the possibility of making any claims about the substance of the soul, be it on the materialist or the immaterialist side of the question. I believe that this attack exercised a profound influence on Thomas Reid. Reid was a committed dualist who saw Hume's attack as a challenge that had to be overcome.² In his *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, he referred explicitly to the central argument of T I iv 5 and tried to articulate an account of the workings of the human mind against which the presuppositions of Hume's sceptical attack would not apply. Central to this account was a theory of what it means for an object of knowledge to be "before" the mind and a fascinating critique of what Reid called the "analogical thinking" that leads us to suppose that an object of knowledge must be literally in the mind, the way chocolates are in a box³—a critique which has been recognized as a profound anticipation of modern work in epistemology.

I do not want to suggest that it was Reid's encounter with T I iv 5 that led to the development of his account of representation. The relation could have been the reverse—his position on representation could have been what established his conviction that Hume's attack rests on premises that a dualist need not accept. What I would like to do, however, is argue that T I iv 5 played a central role in Reid's understanding of Hume's position on representation. It grounded his belief that Hume had seriously misunderstood the nature of representation and it made him convinced that he (Reid) was advancing a quite different theory.

Reid's proclamations on the topic of his differences with Hume have been received with scepticism, if not outright derision, ever since the days of Immanuel Kant and Thomas Brown.⁴ If I am right, T I iv 5 has an important bearing on this issue. A careful look at it and how Reid understood it can do much to illuminate the questions of who meant what and who misunderstood whom, that have for so long vexed our accounts of the relation between Hume and Reid.

Soul and Self in Hume

T I iv 5 is entitled "Of the immateriality of the soul." Unlike the more famous T I iv 6, "Of personal identity," it is not concerned with question of what it is that gives us the idea that we are the same selves from one moment to the next. It is concerned rather with the question of whether there is a peculiar substance, called the mind or the soul, in which all our perceptions inhere. The two questions are distinct, because the mind, even if it exists, may be perceived only intermittently⁵ and so may not give us that one, constant, abiding impression which Hume initially searches for as the origin of our idea of the self. For its part the self, insofar as we know it, turns out for Hume to be something quite different from a mental substance, be it material or immaterial.

But though the questions of soul and self are distinct, they are related. T I iv 5 establishes the negative thesis that we have no idea of mind or soul and no justification, therefore, for supposing that there is any such thing. This negative result immediately raises a question. If we really have no idea of ourselves as minds or souls, continuing in existence from one moment to the next and entertaining our perceptions as we have them, then what is it that makes us even able to think that we exist as some one thing, and what allows us to think that we continue in existence from one moment to the next? What could we possibly be thinking of when we think that our subsequent perceptions are "had" by "the same self" which "had" our previous perceptions, and what could we possibly be thinking of when we think that two distinct, but simultaneous perceptions are "had" by "the same self?" By implicitly invoking these sorts of questions, T I iv 5 provides the entry way to T I iv 6; it sets up the problem and makes the need for its resolution especially immediate. T I iv 6, in turn, provides the positive doctrine that complements the preceding section's negative results: the doctrine that what we really are is just a bundle of perceptions linked by relations of resemblance and cause (or at least that this is all we are aware of when we think of ourselves) and that our notion that we persist through time is merely an artifact of the way memories are connected with one another in this bundle.

Though T I iv 5 has this merely prefatory character, it is of great historical importance. Unlike what is (or at least has in certain circles been) the case

today, the view that there are minds or souls which somehow "have" ideas, or in which ideas "inhere," or before which ideas "stand" was the dominant view of Hume's day. And this view was not merely cashed out as a "folk" metaphor for something more sophisticated or a feature of a merely functional description. It was cashed out in terms of Aristotelian substance ontology. The mind was supposed to be a special kind of thing: an immaterial substance for many, though some had been so bold as to suggest that perhaps matter could entertain perceptions and think as well.⁶ Hume remarks on this fact at the outset of T I iv 5, noting that there are "certain philosophers" who would "promise to diminish our ignorance [about the nature of the mind]." "These philosophers," he says, "are the curious reasoners concerning the material or immaterial substances, in which they suppose our perceptions to inhere." (T 232) The exercise of T I iv 5 was absolutely necessary for Hume to clear the stage of these "curious reasoners" and gain a hearing for his own, radically more limited account of what it is that we can know about the internal or "intellectual" world.

Hume's Preliminary Arguments

Hume's attack on the views of the "curious reasoners" opens with a classical Humean move—one which surprises no student of the Humean approach to the nature of causality or external existence. He asks his imagined opponents what exactly they mean to refer to when they talk of mental substances or the inherence of perceptions in mental substances. From what impressions are these ideas of substance and inherence derived? The charge, of course (a charge Hume has already made when discussing objects in the external world), is that in general our notions of substance and inherence are empty metaphysical notions, not obtained from any actual impressions and so referring to nothing. Since we can make no sense of substance and inherence in general, we can make no sense of the specific question whether the "substance" in which our impressions and ideas "inhere" is material or immaterial.

But might there perhaps be some special reason for admitting these already exploded notions where the doctrine of the internal world is concerned? This is a more difficult question. At first, Hume notes that on the contrary there is an extra reason for not admitting them: By postulating that all our thoughts inhere in mental substances, the "curious reasoners" place our impressions in a different ontological category than that in which they place minds. They identify them as "accidents" rather than substances. This, however, makes it very difficult to understand how we could have any impression of mental substance, or any idea of substance either. For how can an accident of a substance (which is what an impression is), or an idea (which must always represent some antecedent impression, and hence some accident

of a substance), possibly be adequate to represent a substance itself?

As every idea is deriv'd from a precedent impression, had we any idea of the substance of our minds, we must also have an impression of it; which is very difficult, if not impossible, to be conceiv'd. For how can an impression represent a substance, otherwise than by resembling it? And how can an impression resemble a substance, since, according to this philosophy, it is not a substance, and has none of the peculiar qualities or characteristics of a substance? (T 232–233)

There is a remarkable point which makes its way into Hume's argument here. The only way to understand representation, Hume is claiming, is through resemblance; a representation must be like what it represents in order to represent it. This "likeness principle" has far-reaching implications. They will be remarked upon below.

Having raised this special objection to the notion of mental substance, Hume turns to consider whether the "curious reasoners" might nonetheless have some special reason of their own for admitting mental substances. On this score he raises, but quickly dismisses, the suggestion that an analysis of what it means to have a thought would reveal that thoughts cannot be imagined to exist unless there is some thinking substance which has those thoughts. Whatever may be conceived separately may exist separately, and since all the perceptions of the mind are conceived separately, each perception may just as well be considered to be a different "substance" in its own right, requiring nothing further to support its existence.

By the end of the first two and a half pages of T I iv 5 these arguments have run their course and Hume reaches what appears to be his final conclusion:

Thus neither by considering the first origin of ideas, nor by means of a definition are we able to arrive at any satisfactory notion of substance; which seems to me a sufficient reason for abandoning utterly that dispute concerning the materiality and immateriality of the soul, and makes me absolutely condemn even the question itself. (T 234)

But despite the fact that a "sufficient reason" for the conclusion has apparently been given, the argument has not run its course. T I iv 5 continues for another fifteen pages. The extension is made because Hume pauses yet again and considers that there might perhaps be a second, quite different way in which the "curious reasoners" could justify a claim about the necessary existence of a soul in which all our ideas inhere, one, moreover, which is uniquely suited to deciding the thinking matter controversy on the immaterialist side of the question. It is by way of discussion of this issue that Hume makes his most profound (and from Thomas Reid's view most disturbing) points about the controversy over the nature of the soul.

The "Achilles" Argument against Hume

Hume's about-face occurs in the paragraph immediately following that in which he claims to have given a "sufficient reason" for abandoning the dispute over the substance of the soul. "There is one argument commonly employ'd for the immateriality of the soul, which seems to me remarkable," Hume writes at T 234. This may be an understatement. The argument he has in mind is the same one Kant would later refer to as the "Achilles of all dialectical arguments in the pure doctrine of the soul," and "no mere sophistical game,...but an inference which appears to withstand even the keenest scrutiny and the most scrupulously exact investigation."⁷ Hume, like Kant, is so impressed by the force of this argument that he feels a special answer to it is required.⁸

The "Achilles" argument works by appealing to what is taken to be the essential simplicity and indivisibility of a thinking being. A typical "Achilles" will begin by noting that were the mind extended then a thought, such as the thought of a triangle, would either be entertained only in one simple part of it, or it would have to be spread out over various parts. In the former case thought is *ex hypothesi* supposed to occur in something simple and indivisible, not something extended, and the notion of parts of the mind extending beyond the center of thought is otiose. But in the latter case not only the mind, but the thought itself would be extended. Each different part of the mind would possess a different portion of the thought. Thus, in the thought of a triangle, one part of the mind would think vertex A, another vertex B, another vertex C. But in this case each part of the mind would know only that vertex allotted to it and there would be no one part which had the thought of the whole triangle. The only way that a unified thought of the triangle could be supposed to arise would be if the different parts of the mind communicate with one another, making one another aware of what information they possess. But to admit this is to admit that there is at least one part of the mind where the various bits of information originally distributed over different parts are all collected together. Thus, once again we are driven to accept that thought takes place in some part of the mind which is absolutely simple and indivisible. But if infinite divisibility is accepted, then this "point" could be no material thing, because any body in a space, however small, could not be simple and indivisible. It follows that insofar as thinking takes place it must be performed by an immaterial mind, soul or spirit.

Many of Hume's British predecessors, including Cudworth, Clarke, Norris, and a host of lesser lights, gave versions of the Achilles argument and commented on it;⁹ another likely source was Bayle. Remark E of the article on Leucippus in Bayle's *Dictionnaire* contains a classic Achilles.¹⁰ The argument opens when Bayle remarks that one way for a materialist to escape the Achilles argument would be to deny infinite divisibility (as the atomists did) and postulate that the smallest, indivisible parts of matter have the ability to think.

Had the atomists admitted thought, as well as extension and motion, among the properties of atoms, Bayle observes, they would have “furnished some reply to the unanswerable objection to which the view of those who maintain that matter can think (that is to say, have feelings and knowledge) is subject.” Bayle then goes on to describe the unanswerable objection, illustrating it by asking that we imagine a sphere capable of thinking or an extended mind capable of receiving an impression of pain:

If a thinking substance was unified only in the way a sphere is, it would never see a whole tree at once; it would never feel the pain produced by the blow of a stick. Here is a way of convincing everybody of this. Consider the shape of the four parts of the world on a globe. You will never be able to see anything on this globe that contains all of Asia or even an entire river. The part that represents Persia is not the same as the one that represents the kingdom of Siam. And we distinguish a right and left side in the part that represents the Euphrates. It follows from this that if this globe were capable of knowing the shapes with which it has been decorated, it would contain nothing that could say, “I know all Europe, all France, the whole city of Amsterdam, the whole Vistula”; each part of the globe could only know the portion of the shape that fell to it; and since that part would be so small as not to represent any place entirely, the globe’s capability of knowing would be absolutely useless; no act of knowledge would result from this capability; ...[A] thinking entity is not corporeal or material or a composite of several beings. If [it] were such, [it] would not feel any blows from a stick since the pain would divide itself into as many particles as there are in the organs that are struck. Now these organs contain an infinite number of particles; and thus the portion of pain that would belong to each part would be so small that it would not be felt.¹¹

This is, if I may be so bold, an *ad baculum* refutation of materialism.

It is also the substance of the “Achilles” as Hume himself goes on to represent it in T I iv 5 (234–235). Were the mind supposed to be extended, then there would have to be some manner of conjunction conceived between it and the thoughts that it has. Either a thought, regarded as simple, would have to be in some one part of the mind (but then this part of the mind would have to be taken to be itself simple and indivisible, and would furthermore have to be taken to be the sole locus of thought, the remaining parts being otiose), or an individual thought would have to be supposed to be itself extended, which is absurd:

If [a thought] be conjoin'd with the extension [of the mind], it must exist somewhere within its dimensions. If it exist within its dimensions, it must either exist in one particular part; and then that particular part is indivisible, and the perception is conjoin'd only with it, not with the extension: Or if the thought exists in every part, it must also be extended, and separable, and divisible, as well as the body; which is utterly absurd and contradictory. (T 234)

Hume's Response

I want to pause for a second time and make a brief observation about the Achilles argument as Hume has just presented it. Note that in Hume's version of the argument there is made very explicit a certain notion of what it means for a thought to be "had" by, or "in," or "before" a mind. "If it be conjoin'd with the extension, it must exist somewhere within its dimensions," Hume says. Now, Hume is speaking *ad hominem* here. He is characterizing the view of the proponents of the Achilles argument. But the view he is characterizing equates the "perceives" relation with the relation of spatial containment or "local conjunction" as Hume elsewhere puts it. To be perceived by a mind is to be quite literally in the same place as the mind, the way chocolates are in a box. We need to ask whether this a fair representation of the Achilles or whether it imports a notion of representation which a proponent of the Achilles need not be committed to. We also need to ask whether Hume himself thinks that this is the only way to make sense of the notion of being "in" the mind. I have already noted that Hume argues at the outset of T I iv 5 that the notion of inherence in a substance makes no sense. Could he himself have tacitly invoked the notion of spatial containment, or conjunction at a location in space, as an intelligible substitute?

I will return to these questions momentarily. For now, just note that Hume exploits this notion that perception requires local conjunction to mount a shattering attack on the Achilles. The argument, he says, does not really prove anything about the nature of the substance of the soul. It merely makes certain claims about where the soul has to be located insofar as it contains or is conjoined with a thought (T 235). To consider where the soul is when it receives a thought, however, we must consider where the thoughts which supposedly inhere in it are. But when we do this we discover two amazing things. First, we discover that some of our impressions, namely those of smell, taste and hearing, are so far from being located that they do not occupy any place at all, not even a point. (This is amazing because it violates the axiom that whatever exists must be somewhere [T 235].) From this perspective, Bayle's claim that Lucretius could have evaded the Achilles argument by ascribing consciousness to individual atoms would itself be mistaken, because if the impressions the soul receives are not in space at all, then it would

be an error to suppose that even a soul atom, which must always be located somewhere in space, could be locally conjoined with them.

But this is only part of the story. Hume insists that while our sensations of smell, hearing and taste may not be in space at all, those we have of sight and touch are not only located in space, but arrayed in spatially extended aggregates. It may be absurd to talk of one smell being bigger than another, or one taste being further to the left than another, or five sounds being aggregated together to make up an "L" shape, but there is no absurdity, Hume maintains, in supposing that minimally visible colours and *minima tangibilia* do occur at locations relative to one another and are aggregated into patches of varying shapes and sizes. One minimally visible colour point may be added to another to make a coloured dash of two minimal points in length. We have only to open our eyes to receive the clearest and most convincing evidence for the fact that colours are in fact extended, figured, located and movable.

The most vulgar philosophy informs us, that no external object can make itself known to the mind immediately, and without the interposition of an image or perception. That table, which just now appears to me, is only a perception, and all its qualities are qualities of a perception. Now the most obvious of all its qualities is extension. The perception consists of parts. These parts are so situated, as to afford us the notion of distance and contiguity; of length, breadth, and thickness. The termination of these three dimensions is what we call figure. This figure is movable, separable, and divisible. Mobility, and separability are the distinguishing properties of extended objects. And to cut short all disputes, the very idea of extension is copy'd from nothing but an impression, and consequently must perfectly agree to it. To say the idea of extension agrees to any thing, is to say it is extended. (T 239–240)

The last two sentences of this citation invoke a principle we have seen before: the principle that the only way an idea can represent is by means of resemblance. The idea must actually *be* like what it represents; if it represents extension it must itself *be* extended. We should not, however, allow any doubts we may have about the legitimacy of this "likeness principle" to distract us from an even more fundamental observation Hume is making here. What my idea represents, for Hume, is not properly speaking a table, that is, an object which exists independently of being perceived. Properly speaking what it represents is an impression. And the particularly salient observation that Hume has to make is that it is not just *the table* that is extended, it is *my impression* that bears this property. This is not something which is known by appeal to a likeness principle. It is known by immediate experience. For Hume, anyone who attends to his or her *impression* of a table will note that *this impression* consists of a number of component impressions of coloured points

and that these pointal impressions occur alongside one another in space, making up an extended whole. "The *perception* consists of parts," Hume says, and these parts are "situated." The perception does not merely *represent* extension; it *is* extended. This is no "vulgar" notion. The "most vulgar philosophy" informs us only of the undeniably Humean principle that we can know no object but by means of some impression or idea. The fact that the impression is extended is based on an appeal to phenomenal experience. The likeness principle, for its part, is invoked only to establish the extension of the corresponding idea.¹²

Now, Hume suggests, the Achilles argument may be turned back on its creators, with equally devastating force:

The free-thinker may now triumph in his turn; and having found there are impressions and ideas really extended, may ask his antagonists, how they can incorporate a simple and indivisible subject with an extended perception? All the arguments of Theologians may here be retorted upon them. Is the indivisible subject, or immaterial substance, if you will, on the left or on the right hand of the perception? Is it in this particular part, or in that other? Is it in every part without being extended? Or is it entire in any one part without deserting the rest? 'Tis impossible to give any answer to these questions, but what will both be absurd in itself, and will account for the union of our indivisible perceptions with an extended substance. (T 240)

Once we grant that some, at least, of our impressions really are extended, where are we to locate the soul so that it can receive these impressions? Shall we suppose that it covers every part of the extension? Then it is extended. Shall we suppose that it is located only at a certain point of the extension? Then it does not contain the whole; its simplicity restricts it to being able to represent only that infinitesimally small part of the whole thought with which it is locally conjoined. Shall we suppose that it is at each and every point in the whole extended impression while remaining simple and indivisible? Then we admit the absurdity of one and the same thing being located at many different places simultaneously without any detriment to its simplicity.

For Hume the immediate outcome of these considerations is not just a sceptical suspense of judgment on the question of the substance of the soul, but a rejection of the entire question as unintelligible:

To pronounce, then, the final decision upon the whole; the question concerning the substance of the soul is absolutely unintelligible: All our perceptions are not susceptible of a local union, either with what is extended or unextended; there being some of them of the one kind, and some of the other. (T 250)¹³

Representation in Hume and Reid

Earlier I noted that Hume's exposition of the Achilles argument poses two questions. First, is it in fact the case that a proponent of the Achilles must invoke the notion that thinking consists in local conjunction of the mind with its thought, as Hume charges, and second, is it the case that Hume himself has some sort of allegiance to this notion? The second of these questions can be answered abruptly: since Hume does not believe that we have any idea of mind whatsoever, he can have no commitment to any notion of the nature of the relation between the mind and its thoughts. But behind this abrupt observation there is a more sophisticated one to be made: when considering the question of the nature of the relation between the mind and its thoughts in T I iv 5, Hume only floats two alternatives: inherence, which he rejects as an irredeemably obscure metaphysical notion, and spatial containment or "local conjunction," which he rejects on the grounds that it leads to the absurd result that the mind must be both extended over a number of places in space and not located at any place in space. Other alternatives, in particular the alternative that there may be some sort of intentional relation between mental acts and the objects of those acts, are just not in the cards for Hume. There is a sense, therefore, in which Hume is attached to the notion that the only way to account for the relation between a mind and its objects is by local conjunction; he is attached to it in the sense that this is the only way he can even begin to understand what it means for an idea or impression to be "before" the mind.¹⁴

This is a point which was not lost on Thomas Reid. The most remarkable feature of Hume's work, as far as Reid was concerned, was its scepticism about the substance of the soul. Reid mentions this outcome again and again,¹⁵ and he was particularly aware of the argument of T I iv 5. In an all but explicit reference to it, he wrote:

Locke seems to place the ideas of sensible things in the mind; and that Berkeley, and the author of the "Treatise of Human Nature," were of the same opinion, is evident. The last makes a very curious application of this doctrine, by endeavouring to prove from it, That the mind either is no substance [!], or that it is an extended and divisible substance; because the ideas of extension cannot be in a subject which is indivisible and unextended. (H I 210a-b)¹⁶

Not only is Reid aware of the argument of T I iv 5, he appears to accept it. In the continuation of the passage just cited, Reid writes,

I confess I think [Hume's] reasoning in this, as in most cases, is clear and strong. For whether the idea of extension be only another name for extension itself, as Berkeley and this author assert; or whether the

idea of extension be an image and resemblance of extension, as Locke conceived; I appeal to any [one] of common sense, whether extension, or any image of extension, can be in an unextended and indivisible subject. (H I 210a–b)

Indeed, Reid's observation that it is contrary to common sense to suppose that an extended impression or idea resembling extension could be "in" an unextended mind makes it look as if he accepts not only Hume's response to the Achilles, but also the underlying theory of what it means for a thought to be "before" the mind. But the agreement is merely hypothetical. What Reid accepts is that *if* there are extended impressions or ideas of extension "placed in" the mind, *then* the mind must be extended. But unlike Hume, Reid was a committed dualist, who was not willing to countenance the consequent of this conditional. So where he sees Hume arguing *modus ponens*, Reid argues *modus tollens*:

But while I agree with [Hume] in his reasoning, I would make a different application of it. He takes it for granted, that there are ideas of extension in the mind; and thence infers, that, if it is at all a substance, it must be an extended and divisible substance. On the contrary, I take it for granted, upon the testimony of common sense, that my mind is a substance—that is, a permanent subject of thought; and my reason convinces me that it is an unextended and indivisible substance; and hence I infer that there cannot be in it anything that resembles extension. (H I 210b)¹⁷

Reid prided himself on being a Newtonian scientist of the mind, who had eschewed all hypotheses in the attempt to give an account of the workings of the human cognitive system based solely on induction from empirical evidence, notably the evidence supplied by introspection.¹⁸ But introspection at least appears to tell us that some of the "ideas" in our minds, our visual and tactile perceptions, consist of *minima visibilia* and *minima tangibilia* disposed alongside one another in space. Reid refused to accept this. He took it upon himself to give another account of visual and tactile experience, based on a more "cautious and applied" introspection that would be adequate to replace the naive view that extended visual and tactile experiences, consisting of parts disposed alongside one another in space, are locally conjoined with the mind. By the later pages of the *Inquiry*, where Reid's comments on Hume occur, this is precisely what he believed he had achieved.

This method of attacking Hume's account of our impressions and ideas of extension is explicitly described in Reid's "Abstract of the *Inquiry*":

I have therefore proposed this as an *experimentum crucis* by which [Hume's and Berkeley's] systems must stand or fall. If what we call

extension, figure, motion, hardness or softness, roughness or smoothness have any resemblance to the sensations that correspond to them, then I must subscribe to Mr. Hume's creed and cannot avoid it. But if there is no such resemblance, then his system falls to pieces, as well as all the other systems I have named, and we are to seek for a new one. The last appeal in a question of this kind must be to a man's own perceptions.... After taking much pains to attend to my sensations and to form clear and distinct conceptions of them, it appears to me as clear and as certain that they are not like to sensible qualities, as that the pain of the toothache is not like to a triangle.¹⁹

But if this appeal to a "corrected and applied" introspection is not to be merely a sophisticated way of begging the question, it has to be underwritten by some demonstration and an account of how others could be so mistaken in their beliefs about the nature of their sensations. Interestingly, Reid himself appears to have been bothered by the weakness of his direct arguments for the thesis that sensations cannot possibly be solid or extended. Aberdeen MSS.2131.3 cites, without comment, the following excerpt from a review of Priestley's *An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind*:

It has been pertinently asked...what were the experiments by which Dr. Reid made this pretended comparison [between unextended sensations and beliefs about solid and extended objects]? Whether in comparing, as he supposed, the qualities of matter with his sensations, he did not merely compare one set of these sensations with another? And indeed whether he could possibly do any thing else? (Cited by Grave, 14 n.3)

What Reid offers in response to this question is so weak—an appeal to the fact that there is no disagreement about the nature of the cause of solidity (*Inquiry* V iv), a "Molyneux-type" thought experiment designed to show that a blind person with no conception of extension or its modes could not learn of these qualities merely through having tactile sensations (*Inquiry* V vi), and a highly complex and artificial account of our perception of visible figure designed merely to provide an alternative to the apparent fact that our sensations of colour are extended and located in space (*Inquiry* VI i–vii)—that it is hard to escape the impression that the real ground for his views lies in an antecedent conviction about the immateriality of the soul and is not simply the result of a careful analysis of the phenomena of introspection.²⁰ But whether an antecedent commitment to the hypothesis of the existence of immaterial mental substance was the tacit motive for the *Inquiry's* theory of perception, or whether the empirical analysis of the workings of the mind undertaken in the *Inquiry* was rather the justification for Reid's rejection of Hume's

scepticism about the substance of the soul, T I iv 5 and the "only possible account of the relation between thoughts and any purported mental substance" which it presents emerge as the focal point of Reid's *Auseinandersetzung* with Hume. I will conclude with a few, brief remarks on Reid's major points of difference with T I iv 5.

How Reid's Account Differs from Hume's

I have tried to show that Hume's account of representation, as it emerges in T I iv 5, rests on three fundamental claims:

- (i) If there were such a thing as mental substance, then the only way to understand the relation between it and its thoughts would be in terms of local conjunction.
- (ii) There are impressions of sight and touch which are extended in space; there are also impressions of smell, taste and hearing which are nowhere in space.
- (iii) The only way to understand representation is in terms of resemblance. Consequently, if an idea is to represent a visible or tangible object (i.e., impression) it must be like that object and hence must be extended.

I have also tried to show that Reid accepts that the conjunction of (i), (iii) and the first component of (ii) entails that if there is a mind it must be extended. For Reid, however, this amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum* of the conjunction of these three claims. At least one of them has to be rejected. In fact, he either rejects or recasts all three.

(i) Like Hume, Reid accepts that perceptions, sensations and thoughts must be "in" the mind, but, consistent with his rejection of the notion that anything that is in the mind could be spatial, Reid rejects the notion that perceptions, sensations or thoughts are components that are contained in the mind by way of local conjunction. In place of this he advances the ingenious alternative notion that they are properly characterized as acts performed by the mind. As such, they are "in" the mind insofar as the mind performs them, not insofar as it contains them as its parts.²¹

(ii) Because he holds that sensations are acts of mind, not objects locally contained in the mind, Reid accepts that our sensations of smell, taste, and hearing are unextended.²² But he also insists that this is the case with our sensations of vision and touch, as well. The proper data of vision are not immediately evident to us, according to Reid. What we are aware of as the objects of vision are three-dimensional objects preserving constant size at varying distances, and it requires great care and attention to discover that these objects are not immediately perceived, but are inferred from more primitive "visual appearances" (*Inquiry* VI iii). Moreover, these appearances are themselves composites of colour and figure. Of these two components, the figure is not

a sensation,²³ but the intended object of a belief induced in us by the pattern of light on the retina (the “material impression”) in virtue of the innate constitution of the mind (*Inquiry* VI viii). The only properly visual sensations, as it turns out, are nameless “appearances” in virtue of which we are led to identify colour qualities in bodies (*Inquiry* VI vi)—appearances which must be unextended, since they are considered to be distinct from visual figure.²⁴

The situation is the same for touch. Reid illustrates by appeal to the case of our experience of hardness. For Reid, the term “hardness” refers primarily to a spatial determination of bodies—to the property of resistance to relative motion between the parts of a body. In this sense there is no such thing as a hard sensation (since sensations are not extended or divisible into parts), nor, of course, can there be any such thing as a sensation that represents hardness in virtue of any resemblance. When I feel a hard object, say when I grasp a steel shot, I can properly only be said to have certain haptic and kinaesthetic sensations: the peculiar kinaesthetic sensations of strain that go along with squeezing the shot, or the peculiar haptic sensations that come from its pressure against the palm of my hand. However, though our kinaesthetic and haptic sensations are not themselves extended and in no way represent anything extended, Reid maintains that our minds are so constituted that the occurrence of these kinaesthetic and haptic sensations stimulates them to form a belief in the present existence of an external object of a certain shape and weight and size and location and of a certain degree of hardness (*Inquiry* V ii, iv). This belief is not arrived at by way of inference, neither is it induced by a resemblance between our kinaesthetic and haptic sensations and the quality of hardness. It is simply that an “original principle” of our nature leads us to take various tactile sensations as signs for various beliefs about objects. The relation between sensory sign and signified belief is arbitrary, like the relation between the words of a language and their objects, though it is fixed by our nature and not, therefore open to us to change or determine (H I 121a–b, 125a–b). Reid prefers to say that the belief is “suggested” by the sensation (H I 111a).

From Reid’s perspective, Hume’s references to impressions and the ideas which merely “copy” them are irredeemably confused, referring sometimes to what are properly described as sensations (Hume’s impressions of smell, taste and hearing), sometimes to the objects or qualities that are intended or referred to by the beliefs that our sensations suggest to us (Hume’s ideas of extension, which can hardly, for Reid, be mere “copies” of any sensations that could suggest them), and sometimes to a muddle of the two (Hume’s extended impressions of vision and touch).

(iii) This brings up the final and most significant point. Reid rejects Hume’s thesis that representation requires resemblance, and he does so in all directions.

Like Hume, Reid accepts that there is a distinction to be drawn between the immediate effects of objects on the mind, which Hume calls impressions and Reid calls sensations, and the subsequent effects of these effects, which Hume calls ideas and Reid calls, in one species, perceptions (other species include memories and conceptions, but perceptions will concern me most in what follows). But for Reid, the distinction between sensations and perceptions is drawn in an entirely different way than the distinction between impressions and ideas is drawn by Hume. Perceptions are not copies of sensations, as Hume's ideas are copies of impressions.²⁵ Though perceptions are "suggested" by sensations they are radically distinct from them.

A perception, like a sensation, is an act performed by the mind. But it is a very special kind of act. It is an act which involves reference to something other than itself. Every perception involves the conception of some object together with a belief in the present existence of that object (H I 183a). Thus, perception involves three aspects: there is the mind that has the perception, the perception itself considered as an act (of belief) performed by this mind, and the object that is conceived through the perception. But these aspects are not three distinct substances linked by local conjunction, but three terms of one relation. The percept is not a copy that has been taken of the object and then placed inside of the mind; it is the act the mind performs insofar as it is conscious of an object (or, indeed, of any "copy" of an object which might be supposed to have been placed in anything else as a prior condition of perception) and believes in its present existence. As such, it is a very different thing from the object to which it refers.²⁶

With sensation, in contrast to perception, there is no reference to any other object. A sensation, for Reid, is a state of awareness in which a mind exists. This state is induced by the action of external objects on the sense organs, but it in no way resembles these objects, nor does it even represent them. It refers to nothing other than itself. Reid writes:

The form of the expression, *I feel pain*, might seem to imply, that the feeling is something distinct from the pain felt; yet in reality, there is no distinction. As *thinking a thought* is an expression which could signify no more than *thinking*, so *feeling a pain* signifies no more than *being pained*. What we have said of pain is applicable to every other mere sensation. (H I 183a)

Thus, Reid breaks the resemblance relation in every direction. Our sensations do not resemble the solid, extended objects in the world which cause these sensations. Neither do our perceptions resemble the sensations which suggest them. Neither do the objects the perceptions refer to resemble the perceptions through which they are thought. Breaking these resemblance relations allows Reid to maintain that nothing that is "in" the mind—neither its

sensations nor its perceptions—is extended. Sensations may be caused by solid or extended objects, but they do not resemble the qualities of solidity or extension in these objects. And while the perceptions that are suggested by our sensations may be perceptions *of* solid or extended objects, they are not themselves solid or extended—the mind’s act of awareness of and belief in a solid, extended object need not itself be solid or extended (H I 183a). Extension figures only as a quality of the objects that cause sensations or are referred to by perceptions.

In sum, there are three significant features of Hume’s picture of representation that are not shared by Reid. Hume claimed that representation requires resemblance. Perhaps because of this, he claimed that our perceptions of external objects in space are themselves extended. And perhaps because of this, he in turn claimed that if there were a mind, the relation between it and its perceptions of sight and touch would have to be one of conjunction in space. All of these features of the theory of representation are to be found in T I iv 5, where they play a crucial role in Hume’s attempt to demonstrate that the Achilles argument may as well be used to demonstrate that the soul is material as that it is immaterial. Reid, in contrast, believed that the mind could not be extended. Perhaps because of this, he claimed that our sensations could not be extended.²⁷ And, perhaps because of this, he in turn claimed that, since we obviously do know extension, representation must not require the inherence of resembling sensations in the mind.²⁸ To underwrite this thesis, he proposed that what is in the mind is an act performed by the mind, not a component contained within it, and that what is in the mind may refer to extended objects in virtue of some sort of intentional directedness. From this perspective, the issue between Hume and Reid must be viewed as a clash of genuinely conflicting interpretations of the nature of representation and not as a failure, on the part of Thomas Reid, to appreciate that he was not really saying anything different from what had been maintained all along by David Hume.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Twentieth International Hume Conference, Ottawa, July 1993. I am indebted to Roger Emerson, Robert Muehlmann, Glen Woolcott, and an anonymous reviewer for *Hume Studies* for comments on earlier drafts, and to Phillip Cummins for a welcome and important addition (and in some respects, correction) to the argument.

1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), I iv 5, 235; hereafter cited in the text as T.

2 Thomas Reid, *Works*, 2 vols., 8th ed., edited by Sir William Hamilton [Edinburgh: Maclachlan & Stewart, 1880; reprint ed., Hildesheim: Olms, 1967], hereafter cited as H I. In the Dedication to the *Inquiry* Reid acknowledges that he was first led to develop his account of human understanding as a reaction to the scepticism he saw entailed by Hume's *Treatise* (H I 95a-b). But it was particularly Hume's scepticism about the existence of spiritual substance—the fact that Hume “undoes the world of spirits, and leaves nothing in nature but ideas and impressions, without any subject on which they may be impressed” (H I 102a), that disturbed Reid. Berkeley's outright denial of the existence of material substance did not bother him until he read Hume and discovered that the same underlying principles could be used to undermine our belief in spiritual substance. For more evidence of Reid's dualism, see H I 205a.

3 *Inquiry* VII, especially H I 210a.

4 Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena zur einen jeden künftigen Metaphysik* in *Kants Werke, Akademie Textausgabe*, vol. 4 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), following Beck's translation (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950). Kant remarks of Reid, Oswald and Beattie that they were “ever taking for granted that which [Hume] doubted, and demonstrating with zeal and often with impudence that which he never thought of doubting” (258). Brown maintained that Reid and Hume have identical accounts of the role of instinct in generating belief but merely different ways of emphasizing the fact that our beliefs are not rational, and he also claimed that Reid was mistaken to suppose that his predecessors took ideas to be iconic objects existing in the mind rather than effects of objects which lead the mind to think of or intend its objects. For the first criticism, see Sir James Mackintosh, *On the Progress of Ethical Philosophy Chiefly During the XVIIth & XVIIIth Centuries*, 4th ed., edited by W. Whewell (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1872). Alexander Broadie (*The Tradition of Scottish Philosophy* [Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990], 110–118, especially 117–118) gives a more recent statement of this position. (I am indebted to Fred Wilson for drawing Brown's remarks on this topic to my attention.) For the second criticism see S.A. Grave's summation of Brown's position in Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 12–13. A more recent proponent of this objection to Reid is John Yolton, *Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 1–3, 185–201. All of these points are reiterated in John Skorupski, *English-Language Philosophy 1750–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 9–13.

5 Hume at least raises this possibility as a question at T 233.

6 The *locus classicus* is, of course, John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, edited by P.H. Niddich (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979), IV.3.6. Questions may legitimately be raised about whether Locke's own intentions in raising the issue of thinking matter were not more in line with Hume's scepticism on this issue, but his remarks certainly provided occasion for a number of people to take very seriously the thesis that the soul might be material. See John Yolton, *Thinking Matter* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

7 Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1st ed. (Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1781), 351; after Kemp Smith's translation.

8 Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, 53, takes a different line, arguing with reference to the "Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh," that Hume's purpose in the remainder of T I iv 5 was merely to satirize both the materialist and the immaterialist positions. I will have more to say about this momentarily.

9 Ben Lazare Mijuskovic, *The Achilles of Rationalist Arguments* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), chap. 3.

10 Though Mijuskovic mentions Bayle, he strangely omits to treat Leucippus E, surely one of the most brilliant expositions of the Achilles ever written.

11 Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, translated by Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 130–131.

12 As remarked in note 8 above, Yolton has claimed, with reference to the "Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh," that Hume is being satirical in the latter parts of T I iv 5. Admittedly, Hume's attempt in the later portions of the section to show that immaterialism entails Spinozism is tongue-in-cheek. Moreover, he takes an obvious delight in the irony of being able to turn the Achilles argument back on its originators, at T 240. But I do not think we should doubt that he is "speaking in his own voice" when he brings forward his major objections to the Achilles, namely, that some of our impressions are extended while others are not in space at all. The thesis that some of our impressions are extended is, after all, a major tenet of T I ii 1–2. (For more on Hume's sincerity on this matter see Phillip Cummins, "Bayle, Leibniz, Hume and Reid on Extension, Composites and Simples," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7 [1990]: 299–314, especially 307–308 and n. 25.) Yolton's evidence for satire, the "Letter," is lean. Hume's pertinent remarks in the letter consist only of the following:

The Author, has not anywhere that I remember denied the Immateriality of the Soul in the common sense of the word. He only says, "That that Question did not admit of any distinct Meaning; because we had no distinct idea of Substance." (Ernest C. Mossner and John V. Price, eds., *David Hume: A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh* [1745] [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967]; reprinted in David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Eric Steinberg [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977], 122).

To insist that no sense can be made of the question of whether the *soul* is

extended is not the same thing as to insist that no sense can be made of the question of whether *impressions* are extended. Hume could be quite sincere in the "Letter" when he affirms that he holds no position on the soul, but no less sincere in the *Treatise* when he holds that some of our impressions are extended.

13 However, this outcome is merely an *immediate* outcome. As I noted at the outset, the "curious reasoners" have one last weapon in their arsenal: they can claim that the existence of some kind of soul substance, be it material or immaterial, has to be inferred as a grounding for our claims that there is a single self or subject of representation that persists identically the same across time. By the time Hume has dealt with this last objection in T I iv 6, a new, positive position has emerged. It is not just that the very notion of a self which "has" thoughts must be rejected as unintelligible; the substantial self can be replaced with something else: the notion of the self as "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions" (T 252). Here, neither the meaningless metaphysical notion of inherence of perceptions in a substance nor the clear but ultimately absurd notion of local conjunction with a substance play a role. There is no relation whatsoever between the subject and its perceptions. There just are perceptions, some extended, some not.

14 I am speaking somewhat loosely here. Since our perceptions of tastes, smells and sounds are not, for Hume, in space at all, the nature of the conjunction between them and the mind cannot be called "local" conjunction, if by "local" a location in space is always intended. Nonetheless, even here Hume's notion is that the mind must be located where its perceptions are. It is this notion that drives the argument that, since these perceptions are not spatial, the mind cannot be in space insofar as it has them.

15 H I 102a, 108a–b, 109a, 129a, and finally in passages from *Inquiry* VII which will be considered below.

16 Reid's editor, Hamilton, strangely claims to find no precedent for the argument Reid is referring to here, either in Hume or elsewhere (H I 210b n.+). But the precedent is obviously T I iv 5. The central premise of T I iv 5, that for an idea to be before the mind is for it to be contained in or locally conjoined with the mind, is right up front in the first sentence, where Reid refers to the thesis, purportedly common to Locke, Berkeley and Hume, that ideas are "placed in" the mind. And Reid's mention of the "curious application" of this claim to draw the conclusion that ideas of extension cannot be in an unextended mind is an obvious reference to the devastating manner in which Hume turns the Achilles argument back on the theologians in T I iv 5 (240). The only problem is that Reid does not get the conclusion quite right. The result is not that the mind is either no substance or an extended substance, but that the mind, if it existed, would have to be both an extended substance and an unextended (spiritual) substance. The thesis that the mind is no substance at all is Hume's ultimate conclusion from this contradictory result; it is not offered as an alternative to the thesis that the mind is extended. As far as Hume is concerned, the alternative that the mind is extended is no more acceptable than the alternative that it is spiritual; both are contradicted by the nature of at least some of the perceptions that are supposed to be in the mind.

17 In fact, Hume's actual argument is *modus tollens* as well. Hume agrees with Reid that the mind could not be extended (not because this violates common sense, however, but because it is inconsistent with what is entailed by our having impressions and ideas of smell, taste and touch). But rather than reject the notion that the mind has extended impressions or ideas of extension, as Reid does, he rejects the idea of a mind in which percepts inhere as unintelligible.

18 For Reid's Newtonianism and rejection of hypotheses, see *Inquiry* I i, H I 97b and 97b–98a. For a discussion of the role of introspection see *Inquiry* I ii and the passage from Reid's "Abstract" cited below. Reid was far from advocating an uncritical reliance on introspection, which he regarded as polluted by "habits, associations and abstractions" (H I 99a) and as restricted in the scope of its validity (H I 98a–b). But he also held that "reflection" is "the only instrument by which we discern the powers of the mind" (for all its faults), and that with "great caution and application" one could at least avoid serious errors and provide an analysis of the human faculties adequate to ground a system of the mind (H I 99a–b).

19 Thomas Reid, "An Abstract of the *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*," edited by David Fate Norton, in S.F. Barker and T. Beauchamp, eds., *Thomas Reid: Critical Interpretations: Philosophical Monographs* 3 (1976): 128a–129a.

20 See note 23 below, which cites one instance where Reid's supposedly empirical-introspective analysis of the phenomena of vision is influenced by an antecedent acceptance of the metaphysical hypothesis of the existence of an immaterial soul as subject in which thoughts inhere. That Reid has Hume's position on the substance of the soul in mind from the very outset, and develops his account of perception with the explicit purpose of responding to it, is evident from passages such as *Inquiry* II vi (H I 108a–110a).

21 H I 115a. See also the "Conclusion" to the *Inquiry*, which contains a long polemic against the containment model of the relation between minds and their states.

22 The point is made for smell at H I 105a and extended to the other senses at H I 115a.

23 The figure [we perceive] is altogether external; and therefore cannot be called an impression upon the mind, without the grossest abuse of language. If it would be said, that it is impossible to perceive a figure, unless there be some impression of it upon the mind, I beg leave not to admit the impossibility of this without some proof: and I can find none. Neither can I conceive what is meant by an impression of figure upon the Mind. I can conceive an impression of figure upon wax, or upon any body that is fit to receive it; but an impression of it upon the mind, is to me quite unintelligible; and, although I form the most distinct conception of the figure, I cannot, upon the strictest inspection, find any impression of it upon my mind. (H I 146a)

Note how the presupposition of the immateriality of the mind drives the argument of this passage. Were this presupposition set aside, all that would be

left of Reid's argument would be an appeal to ignorance: that it must be possible to know extension without there being extended impressions in the mind because no one has yet proven that it is impossible to do so. Even were this considered a legitimate observation, it would leave something to be desired when considered as a proof of possibility (let alone actuality). How, we might ask, does an act of the mind achieve reference to qualities of extension which it in no way exemplifies? We can understand how a seal impresses wax, how the spatial features of a body might be mapped by spatial features of sensory stimuli in the body, and how an "impression" which maps or "copies" an object could be contained in a subject as one of its spatial parts. All of this is clearly possible. But what makes it possible for an unextended act of mind to refer to its intended object? The *Inquiry* offers no answer—no answer, that is, beyond a bare appeal to the bald fact that this happens and a claim that the alternative of extended impressions being contained in an extended mind is "unintelligible." It is indeed unintelligible—but only for a dualist.

24 Because the figure of a visible appearance is suggested by one thing (the material impression on the retina) while its colour is suggested by another (visual sensations), Reid has a localization problem. The parts of a visual appearance can be differently coloured, and different visible figures can be simultaneously presented by the same material impression on the retina. In virtue of what do we decide which visual sensations of colour refer to which visible figures? Reid seems never to have considered this question. For Hume, of course, the problem does not even arise, since Hume's visual impressions are not only coloured, but located and aggregated into extended shapes to begin with.

25 For Reid, our perceptions represent many things of which we have no sensation whatsoever, and Hume's notion that "ideas" merely copy "impressions" is one on which he heaps scorn and charges with many absurdities. See *Inquiry* II v and VI xxiv (H I 107a–b, 198b–199a).

26 The object, it should be noted, need not even exist for the percept to exist. For more on the nature of the object of perception for Reid, see Phillip Cummins, "Reid's Realism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (1974): 317–340, especially 317–330.

27 The most obvious place where he does this is the passage considered above, H I 210b, but there are other passages, such as H I 146a, which make the crucial claim that visual figure could not be a sensation by invoking an inability to understand how an extended object could be in the mind.

28 For explicit instances of this pattern of reasoning, see H I 128a–b and 208b.

Received July 1994

Revised January 1995