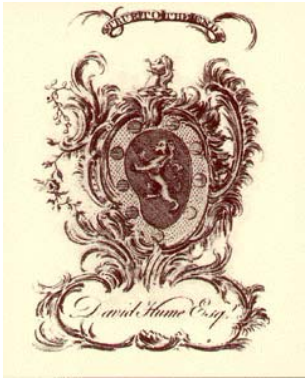

Nicholas Wolterstorff. ***Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology***
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NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF. *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001. Pp. xiii + 265. ISBN 0-521-79013-1, cloth, $60.00.

Reid advocates some fascinating views and voices forceful arguments on their behalf, the plausibility of which has only ripened with age. Perhaps the best way to characterize Wolterstorff's book is as a guided tour of these arguments. The book is timely because there are only a handful of books explicating Reid's theories. Due to its structure and scope, Wolterstorff's effort occupies a place on the scholarly shelf near Keith Lehrer's *Thomas Reid* (London: Routledge, 1989) and Roger D. Gallie's *Thomas Reid and the "Way of Ideas"* (Boston: Kluwer, 1989). Wolterstorff's point of departure and his primary line of investigation is the analysis of conception (or thinking). I will focus on this aspect of the book in this review at the risk of neglecting other important and able discussions.

Wolterstorff introduces three types of conceiving—by a singular concept, by naming, and by acquaintance—none of which comes directly from Reid. His decision to begin his analysis of Reid's theory of perception with the theory of conception is wise, though he approaches that issue at some distance from Reid's work. It is wise because commentators on Reid's theory of perception frequently assume the most important issue in the neighborhood is the *analysis* of our knowledge of the world, which was not something foremost in Reid's development of his views. Furthermore, Wolterstorff sees (as only John Haldane has) the importance of Reid's theory of thinking in his response to the Ideal Theory.

After repeating Reid's characterization of the Ideal Theory, Wolterstorff begins an extended analysis of Reid's primary objections to it. The Ideal Theory fails because (1) the ideas and images (construed as entities) in the mind and the causal or associative relations between them cannot explain thinking (46ff)); (2) it substitutes the activity of agents with the activity of matter (54ff); (3) there are few arguments in its favor (65ff); (4) it confuses sensation and perception, mistakenly making sensations intentionally related to objects (80ff); (5) it makes awareness of external objects a matter of immediate introspective awareness of images (85ff); (6) it assumes that sensations must resemble their objects (86ff); (7) it implies that perceptual beliefs require inference from sense data (92ff).

Wolterstorff discusses Reid's initial objections to the Ideal Theory comprehensively rather than presenting these arguments formally. The central virtue of this approach is that, while some previous literature has emphasized the

role of reductios to skepticism in Reid's case against the Ideal Theory, Wolterstorff nicely shows the breadth and sophistication of Reid's case. However, as a consequence of this approach a variety of important questions remain unanswered.

Consider (1) above. Wolterstorff doesn't specify the demands on what it is to *explain* thinking, which is unfortunate since Reid's comments can appear question-begging. Wolterstorff spots this problem on the horizon without directly dealing with it. The discussion of explanation is brief and occurs in two places (50 and 63–5). Wolterstorff says that the Ideal Theory's explanation of thinking fails to conform with Reid's demands on *scientific explanation* (50). Taken as an objection against the Ideal Theory's analysis of thought, this leaves unaddressed who has the burden of proof. Since scientific explanations involve necessary laws according to Wolterstorff (51–2), Hume would grant that he hasn't offered anything that should be construed as a scientific analysis of thinking. Despite this, Reid's corpus does contain the tools needed to construct arguments against representational theories of thinking (in his commencement addresses, published as his *Philosophical Orations*). There Reid, like some contemporary thinkers, argues explicitly that the representational theory of the mind cannot account for intentionality. Wolterstorff's interpretive position could have been be strengthened by filling this lacuna and considering Reid's arguments in these writings.

One wonders how Reid himself accounts for thinking of mind-independent objects given Wolterstorff's assertion that Reid's greatest criticism of the Ideal Theory was that it fails to do so. He quotes Reid saying that it is "a fact" and "an original principle" that there are intelligible relationships between external objects and sensations, and sensations and conceptions (94–5). I fear Wolterstorff is too accommodating to Reid. He allows Reid to state *that* the needed relationships exist but doesn't demand that Reid justify this claim. This makes obvious that, while Reid is entitled to reject a Humean account of thinking as too rudimentary, so Hume is entitled to reject the unjustified and unstated assumptions in Reid's account—if that's the word to describe a view on which these relations are "a natural kind of magic" (*Inquiry*, chap. 5, sec. 3). Here the need to address the nature of explanation becomes doubly important for in Wolterstorff's hands Reid and Hume appear to talk past one another.

Reid's standard analysis of perception states that perceptual events include irresistible conceptions and beliefs about external objects. Wolterstorff briefly discusses primary and secondary qualities, original and acquired perceptions, and the role of sensations in perception. He notes, rightly, Reid's failure to state precisely the role of sensations in perceptions, but Wolterstorff follows Reid by characterizing sensations in very different ways: as signs of external objects (109), as appearances (121), and as representations (134).

His account of Reid's distinction between original and acquired perceptions is needed and substantially correct. He notes the way in which original perceptions are conceptually simple, whereas the content of acquired perceptions is complex. All content contained in acquired perceptions first appears in original perceptions. This distinction (about content) accompanies an epistemic distinction between the two, which is less clear in Wolterstorff. He says that no perceptual beliefs "involve" inference (110), but I believe the discussion here is more coarse than in Reid's writings. Specifically, Wolterstorff doesn't enumerate various levels of reasoning present in the process of perceptual learning and in forming acquired perceptions. In this connection one might argue that the epistemic status of all acquired perceptions *depends upon* inferences, even though most acquired perceptions do not involve the occurrent performance of inferences.

More important than this is the role of conception in perception because Reid's theory of perception may be indirect depending upon the conceptual component in perception. This section may make for challenging reading for two reasons. First, while Wolterstorff does not drown his narrative with references to secondary literature (thankfully), nonetheless it would have been helpful here to distinguish types of indirectness—epistemic, perceptual and conceptual—that have been set out in reference to Reid's work by Alston and Pappas. Secondly, Wolterstorff conducts the debate about the nature of conception in perception by revisiting his taxonomy of conception, but he adds concepts to an already nested set of terms.

The driving question is: does perception produce acquaintance with the world? "Acquaintance" means something like non-representational, uninterpreted conceptual apprehension of the world. Wolterstorff thinks the answer is "No." He makes a *prima facie* case on behalf of a negative answer by observing that Reid never says it does (147). While I think Wolterstorff's main argument for this conclusion falters, it is worth careful consideration.

He emphasizes the interpretive work we must do to understand the "signs," Reid's technical term for the role of sensations in perception, that cue our awareness of external objects. Wolterstorff says, "Perception involves reading the signs, interpreting the symbols" (119) and "Reid regularly speaks of . . . conception and immediate belief . . . as *interpretations* of signs" (148). Lying in the background of his argument is an unstated intermediate conclusion: it is not the case both that sensations are natural signs of qualities of mind-independent objects, and that we have non-representational, uninterpreted conceptions of qualities of mind-independent objects (see 153). This depends on the above claims that signs are conceptual intermediaries needing interpretation, which (while I realize it was not Wolterstorff's purpose to

produce exhaustive support for this attribution) does not seem justified textually or philosophically.

Philosophically, Wolterstorff argues that if our concepts of qualities directly acquaint us with qualities, "the sensory experience seems otiose" (148). Wolterstorff assumes that a sensory experience is not otiose and is instead necessary, from which he uses *modus tollens*. But this assumption is not fully justified. Reid is an "anti-sensationalist" (Keith DeRose's term) because in his *experimentum crucis* he argues that sensations do not account for our repertoire of concepts, hence are unnecessary *for acquiring concepts*. This alone does not imply sensations are unnecessary *tout court*. To think so is to overlook Reid's point that sensations are intended by God for and are physically necessary *for our survival* (*Inquiry*, chap. 2, sec. 9). Wolterstorff's assumption, necessary for his main argument about the indirectness of conception, is not as yet fully defended. While I think his argument is unsuccessful as a result, his important discussion will draw Reid scholars to examine these and related arguments.

While I've taken issue with several of its steps, I praise Wolterstorff for finding and exploring this new territory with the line of argument he sets out. Until now the crucial role of conception in Reid's theory of perception has been largely overlooked. The book also contains chapters about the epistemology of testimonial beliefs, skepticism, and common sense. Because these issues are staples of Reid scholarship and because Wolterstorff's discussions of them do not break ground in the way his treatment of conception does, those already acquainted with Reid may find them less interesting. The concluding chapter is a much appreciated and eloquent defense of the claim that Reid's method puts perhaps unfamiliar limits on the possibility of knowledge.

My final comment is that the book does not utilize rich, growing resources in the secondary literature. Wolterstorff makes only four references to (three) papers on Reid other than his own. As a result, several of his discussions will be of greater interest to those unfamiliar with this literature and of lesser interest to experts in the field, though even experts on Reid will learn much from them.

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