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North American Philosophical Publications

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Source: *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), pp. 171-189

Published by: [University of Illinois Press](#) on behalf of [North American Philosophical Publications](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27745053>

Accessed: 16/11/2014 19:16

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THOMAS REID'S THEORY OF MEMORY

Rebecca Copenhaver

I. REID'S CRITICISM OF THE IDEAL THEORY OF MEMORY

Reid regards the history of the philosophy of memory, from the Peripatetics to Hume, as a failure.¹ Reid begins his history with the Peripatetic theory as described by Alexander of Aphrodisias and translated in James Harris's *Hermes*:

Now what fancy or imagination is, we may explain as follows: We may conceive to be formed within us, from the operation of our senses about sensible objects, some impression, as it were, or picture in our original sensorium, being a relict of that motion caused within us by the external object; a relict, which, when the external object is no longer present, remains, and is still preserved, being as it were its image, and which, by being thus preserved, becomes the cause of our having memory: Now such a sort of relict, and as it were impression, they call fancy or imagination.²

The theory presented by Alexander holds that there is no difference in kind between imagination and memory; both are caused by impressions that remain after the object that impressed upon our senses is gone. Reid criticizes this theory on two counts. First, the theory does not meet the two strictures of Reid's first Newtonian rule of philosophizing: one, posit no merely theoretical causes—only observable causes; two, posit only those causes sufficient to explain the phenomenon in question. Reid holds that we have no observational evidence of impressions on the brain; impressions are mere theoretical entities. “[W]e are totally ignorant of the nature of the impression upon the brain . . . [and] there is no evidence . . . that the impression made upon the brain in perception remains after the object is removed.”³ Furthermore, even if we stipulate that impressions on the brain exist, and that they remain after the original cause of the impression is gone, their existence is insufficient to explain the cause of a mental state like memory.⁴ At most, we could establish a correlation between impressions and memories, but such a

correlation would be a law of nature, not an account of how impressions *cause* memories.

So if it were certain, that the impression made on the brain in perception remain as long as there is any memory of the object; all that could be inferred from this is, that, by the laws of Nature, there is a connection established between that impression, and the remembrance of that object. But how the impression contributes to this remembrance, we should be quite ignorant; it being impossible to discover how thought of any kind should be produced, by an impression on the brain.⁵

The only possible causal explanation of memory in terms of impressions, according to Reid, would appeal to a resemblance between impressions and memories. But Reid argues that no impression can resemble any mental state. Reid himself holds that no scientific explanation of the causes of memory is possible. Science is simply unable to discover causes; science discovers laws of nature.⁶ The defect of the ancient theory is that it posits a theoretical entity—an impression on the brain—and assigns it as a cause of memory.

Second, Reid argues that if impressions are the causes of mental states, and if sensory perceptions are caused by impressions, then if the impression remains after the object of perception is gone, we should continue to perceive the object, not remember or imagine it. After all, according to this theory, the impression, not the object, is the immediate cause of perception. “But granting that the impression upon the brain continues after its cause is removed, its effects ought to continue while it continues; that is, the sensation and perception should be as permanent as the impression on the brain.”⁷

Reid next criticizes Locke’s theory of memory, which he regards as having inherited many of the misleading metaphors implicit in the ancient theory.⁸ First, Locke appeals to something akin to the sensorium: a repository of past ideas. Second, Locke appeals to the imagistic, pictorial characterization of ideas. Reid excerpts the following passage from Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

The next Faculty of the Mind, whereby it makes a farther Progress towards Knowledge, is that which I call *Retention*, or the keeping of those simple *Ideas*, which from Sensation or Reflection it hath received. This is done in two ways. First, by keeping the *Idea*, which is brought to it, for some time actually in view, which is called *Contemplation*.

The other way of Retention is the Power to revive again in our Minds those *Ideas*, which after imprinting have disappeared, or have been as it were laid aside out of sight. . . . This is *Memory*, which is at it

were the Store-house of our *Ideas*. . . . But our *Ideas* being nothing, but actual Perceptions in the Mind, which cease to be any thing, when there is no perception of them, this *laying up* of our *Ideas* in the Repository of the Memory, signifies no more but this, that the Mind has a Power, in many cases, to revive Perceptions, which it once had, with this additional Perception annexed to them, that it has had them before. And in this Sense it is, that our *Ideas* are said to be in our Memories, when indeed, they are actually no where, but only there is an ability in the Mind, when it will, to revive them again; and as it were paint them anew on it self, though some with more, some with less difficulty; some more lively, and others more obscurely.⁹

Reid notes first what Locke himself acknowledges in this passage, namely, that the metaphor of memory as a kind of repository or storehouse is just that—a metaphor.¹⁰ That this must be so follows from Locke's commitment to the thesis that ideas are momentary and non-continuous and to the thesis that identity over time requires a continuous existence. As a result of these two commitments, Locke cannot hold that numerically identical ideas remain stored over time. However, Reid criticizes Locke for replacing this storehouse metaphor with an equally implausible metaphor that in memory "the mind, as it were, paints ideas anew upon itself." Reid asks what model the mind uses to paint this idea anew upon itself. If the mind uses a previous idea as its model, then it must have a memory of this previous idea, but this presupposes rather than explains memory.¹¹ In a rare moment of charity, Reid allows that Locke intends his description of the mind as a painter as a metaphor. Reid interprets Locke as holding non-metaphorically that memory consists of two perceptions—a present perception and a belief about that present perception that one has previously enjoyed a qualitatively similar perception. But even on this reinterpretation, Reid argues, Locke's account of memory is circular. If memory is partly constituted by a belief that some present perception is qualitatively similar to a perception one has enjoyed in the past, this belief must be made on the basis of some cognitive relation to the past perception that is informative about the qualitative character of the past perception. But this cognitive relation can only be secured through memory.

We can only believe, that we had formerly ideas or perceptions very like to them, though not identically the same. But whether we perceive them to be the same, or only like to those we had before, this perception, one would think, supposes a remembrance of those we had before, otherwise the similitude or identity could not be perceived.¹²

Reid concludes his history of the philosophy of memory with his criticism of Hume's theory. Reid quotes Hume's *Treatise*:

We find by experience, that when any impression has been present with the mind, it again makes its appearance there as an idea; and this it may do after two different ways: Either when in its new appearance it retains a considerable degree of its first vivacity, and is somewhat intermediate betwixt an impression and an idea; or when it entirely loses that vivacity, and is a perfect idea. The faculty by which we repeat our impressions in the first manner, is call'd the MEMORY, and the other the IMAGINATION.¹³

Reid reapplies his objections against Locke's theory to Hume's theory. Hume holds that ideas have no continued existence, and so he cannot claim that a numerically identical idea can reappear, on pain of inconsistency.¹⁴ In addition, Hume's theory that memory consists in an idea that is qualitatively similar to, but less forceful and lively than a previous idea, is subject to the same circularity objection as Locke's. Both judgments of qualitative similarity and degrees of difference in force and liveliness between present and past ideas presuppose the ability to make a past idea an object of thought. But this ability—memory—is precisely what is at issue.

Reid then presents two additional objections against Hume's version of the theory of ideas. The first is that Hume's claim that we have the power to repeat ideas contradicts his claim that impressions are the efficient causes of ideas.¹⁵ Reid's second objection is more penetrating: degrees of force and vivacity are insufficient to explain the differences between perception, memory and imagination. According to Reid, Hume holds that perception, memory and imagination do not differ in kind, but only in the degree of force and vivacity of ideas. Ideas with the greatest degree of force and vivacity are perceptions; ideas with a lesser degree of force and vivacity than perceptions are memories; ideas with the least degree of force and vivacity are imaginings. But, Reid argues, I may have perceptions that are less forceful and vivacious than some of my memories and memories that are less forceful and vivacious than some of my imaginings. Reid compares striking one's head against a wall—a forceful and vivacious impression—and just lightly touching it to the wall—a weak and lifeless sort of impression. Nevertheless, lightly touching one's head to the wall is neither a memory nor an imagining.¹⁶

Even if perceptions, memories and imaginings did typically differ in degree of force and vivacity, Reid argues, such difference is insufficient to account for the special quality of presentness represented in my perceptions, the special quality of pastness represented in my memories and the special quality of atemporality represented in my imaginings.

The belief which we have in perception, is a belief of the present existence of the object; that which we have in memory is a belief of its

past existence; the belief of which we are now speaking, is belief of its future existence, and in imagination there is no belief at all. Now I would gladly know of this author, how one degree of vivacity fixes the existence of the object to the present moment; another carries it back to time past; a third, taking a contrary direction, carries it into futurity; and a fourth carries it out of existence altogether.¹⁷

Hume's theory of memory fails to account for the quality of pastness represented in our memories for two reasons. First, although many of our memories may be weak and faint, their weakness and faintness are not necessary features of these states and so surely not features essential to their identity as memories. Second, no current apprehension can serve as an inferential basis for judgments concerning events in the past because current apprehensions represent events as present.

For according to that theory, the immediate object of memory, as well as every other operation of the understanding, is an idea present to the mind. And, from the present existence of this idea of memory I am led to infer, by reasoning, that six months ago, or six years ago, there did exist an object similar to this one.

But what is there in the idea that can lead me to this conclusion? What mark does it bear of the date of its archetype?¹⁸

Neither the qualitative content nor the representational content of current apprehension contains information on the basis of which we can infer to a past event. Apprehension represents what it does as being present and no amount of reflection on or alteration of the force and vivacity of the representation is sufficient for a representation of events in the past as past.

II. VARIETIES OF MEMORY

Memory is a diverse phenomenon. I remember an event. The event that I remember is having had dinner with my brother last night. This memory allows me to remember the fact *that* I had dinner with my brother last night. I also remember the fact *that* my parents went to college in Omaha, though I do not remember the events that constituted my parents going to college in Omaha. The salient point is that I had not yet been born, and so although I remember *that* my parents went to college in Omaha, I cannot remember my parents going to college in Omaha. Moreover, I may fail to remember an event to which I was witness, even though I remember *that* the event occurred. For example, I may not remember my tenth birthday party, though I remember *that* I had a tenth birthday party. Also, I may remember how to play baseball, and how to bake a chocolate cake, though I do not remember learning the rules of baseball or the recipe for chocolate cake nor do I remember *that* a base runner

must retouch the bag after a foul ball and *that* chocolate cake calls for a teaspoon of baking power.

Contemporary philosophers and cognitive psychologists have introduced useful distinctions among these varieties of memory. Endel Tulving distinguishes between episodic memory, semantic memory and procedural memory.¹⁹ My remembering how to play baseball and how to bake a chocolate cake is procedural; the memory consists in a set perceptual, motor and cognitive skills. My memory of having had dinner with my brother last night is an episodic memory, and my memory that my parents went to college in Omaha is a semantic memory, both are propositional rather than procedural. M. G. F. Martin describes the two characteristics of episodic memory that distinguish it from semantic memory:

First, only such memories can be properly reported by using the form, 'S remembers/recalls [x] *f*-ing', as in 'Mary remembers John falling asleep in the talk', 'Jo remembers being inoculated for smallpox'. Second, it is held that such statements about memory can be true only where the person remembering meets what we can call the Previous Awareness Condition: that one can remember an event only where one previously witnessed it or was the conscious agent of it.²⁰

The Previous Awareness Condition on episodic memory has been developed and examined extensively by Sydney Shoemaker among others.²¹ It is a necessary but insufficient condition for episodic memory. If one has an experience as of having been lost in a shopping mall as a child, but such experience does not meet the Previous Awareness Condition—that is, if one was not in fact witness to being lost in a shopping mall as a child—such an experience is not an episodic memory. However, one can have been a witness or conscious agent of an event, and so meet the Previous Awareness Condition without thereby having an episodic memory of the event. I was witness to my tenth birthday party, though I do not recall my tenth birthday party.

Semantic memories are properly reported using a factive complement—a *that*-clause—after the verbs 'remember' or 'recall,' as in 'Rebecca remembers that she had a tenth birthday party,' 'Rebecca recalls that her parents went to college in Omaha.' The Previous Awareness Condition that holds for episodic memory is not a condition on semantic memory.²² I was neither a witness nor a conscious agent of my parents going to college in Omaha, though I do remember that they went to college in Omaha. And though I was a witness to my tenth birthday party, I have no episodic memory of this event, and so there is no previous awareness of mine connected with my semantic memory that I had a

tenth birthday party. Of course, episodic memories, which must meet the Previous Awareness Condition, may ground semantic memories.

Tulving recognizes that the distinction between episodic and semantic memory is not new; it has been employed in one form or another throughout the history of philosophy and psychology.²³ For example, in the early twentieth century, Henri Bergson and Bertrand Russell developed a similar distinction.²⁴ Russell's distinction between personal memory and factual memory has become commonplace in philosophy.

Martin has argued that an additional distinction between apprehension and acquaintance is required in order to understand episodic memory.²⁵ Acquaintance, according to Martin, is, like knowledge, a standing condition. I can remain acquainted with Berlin, though I am not currently apprehending Berlin. Apprehension, on the other hand, is episodic. "We apprehend events through either perceiving the events or through being their conscious agent."²⁶ Acquaintance presupposes apprehension and prior episodes of apprehension are necessary for retained acquaintance. According to Martin, episodic memory consists in the preservation of cognitive contact with an event—preservation of past apprehension. Episodic memory is not a current apprehension of a past event, but rather an act that preserves a past apprehension. Through memory, we retain cognitive contact with events with which we may no longer have current apprehension or acquaintance.

Like most philosophers, Reid is most interested in episodic memory. Though the terminology is not Reid's, Reid's theory of memory calls upon the Previous Awareness Condition, the distinction between episodic memory and semantic memory, and the distinction between memory as retained past apprehension rather than current apprehension of a past event.

Things remembered must be things formerly perceived or known. I remember the transit of Venus over the sun in the year 1769. I must therefore have perceived it at the time it happened, otherwise I could not now remember it. Our first acquaintance with any object of thought cannot be by remembrance. Memory can only produce a continuance or renewal of a former acquaintance with the things remembered.²⁷

Reid uses the term 'acquaintance,' though those things that are retained through memory, according to Reid, are things previously perceived or known. That is, what is retained, on Reid's theory, is cognitive contact with events previously *apprehended* through perception, or known by acquaintance. This is not inconsistent with the view that memory is preserved past apprehension. I was once acquainted with my grandmother, and my acquaintance with her was grounded in a series of

apprehensions of events in which my grandmother figured and to which I was witness. When I remember my grandmother, I preserve one or more of these apprehensions that served as a basis for my acquaintance with her. Though I may not now apprehend nor remain acquainted with my grandmother, through memory I preserve those past apprehensions by which I was once acquainted with her.

Reid is explicit that what we are here calling the Previous Awareness Condition is a necessary condition for episodic memory. Furthermore, he holds that reports of episodic memory can be true only if the person making the report satisfies the Previous Awareness Condition. Reid holds that experiences that otherwise appear to be episodic memories but which fail the Previous Awareness Condition are not episodic memories.

I remember that twenty years ago I conversed with . . . a person; I remember several things that passed in that conversation; my memory testifies not only that this was done, but that it was done by me who now remember it: If it was done by me, I must have existed at that time, and continued to exist from that time to the present: If the identical person whom I call myself, had not a part in that conversation, my memory is fallacious; it gives a distinct and positive testimony of what is not true.²⁸

Reid not only distinguishes between episodic memory and semantic memory, he holds that semantic memories are not, strictly speaking, memories. Reid does not claim that semantic memories represent one's presence as a witness or agent of some event of which one was neither witness nor agent. Semantic memories do not *necessarily* represent one's presence as a witness or agent of an event, though they may, and so failure to meet the Previous Awareness Condition will not *necessarily* produce a false semantic memory report. Rather, according to Reid, semantic memories that do not bear a relation to any episodic memory of the event picked out by the that-clause in the semantic memory report are best classified as beliefs or knowledge rather than memories.

A past event may be known by reasoning, but that is not remembering it. When I remember a thing distinctly, I disdain equally to hear reasons for or against it. And so I think does every man in his senses.²⁹

I may have other good evidence of things which befell me, and which I do not remember: I know who bare me, and suckled me, but I do not remember these events.³⁰

Reid's point here is not merely terminological. We may distinguish between two kinds of semantic memories: those that bear a relation to an episodic memory of the event described in the semantic memory

report, and those that do not. For example, my memory that I had a tenth birthday party is not, though it could have been, related to an episodic memory of my tenth birthday party. My memory that I had dinner with my brother last night, however, does bear a relation to my episodic memory of dining with my brother. Reid claims that semantic memories that do not bear relations to episodic memories are beliefs, or knowledge, rather than memories. He claims this because he requires a distinction between two sorts of beliefs about past events both of which can be expressed in semantic memory reports. He requires this distinction because he holds that non-inferential beliefs of past events are *ingredient* in episodic memory.

III. REID'S THEORY OF MEMORY

Memory consists, Reid says, in a conception of and belief about a past event.³¹ Reid writes that we may remember "anything which we have seen, or heard, or known, or done, or suffered."³² And he claims that we may remember sensations, qualities and other "things that are past."³³ However, there is reason to interpret Reid as holding that the objects of memory are primarily events—things that *happen* or have a duration—and only secondarily concrete objects or properties that figure in events. There are passages in which Reid claims that events are the objects of memory.³⁴ By themselves, however, these passages leave open the possibility that Reid holds that events are just one of the "things past" that we remember. But Reid also holds that our conception of and belief in duration is supplied by memory. Both the duration of the events we remember and the interval between their occurrence and the time at which remember them give rise to our conception of and belief in duration.³⁵ If memory were not primarily directed towards events, then his position that the conception of and belief in duration would be impossible without memory would be unsupported.

The belief-conception structure of memory mirrors Reid's account of perception, which he claims also consists in a conception and belief.³⁶ According to Reid, the belief that is ingredient in memory is a belief of some past event that it happened.³⁷ The belief can be about the event because conception provides access to the event, to which event the belief that it happened is directed. In other words, the conception of the event that is ingredient in memory supplies the object of the belief, also ingredient in memory, that the event did really occur.³⁸ Finally, Reid claims that in remembering an event we not only believe that the event happened but also that we who now remember the event existed at the time of the event.

The remembrance of a past event is necessarily accompanied with the conviction of our own existence at the time the event happened. I cannot remember a thing that happened a year ago, without a conviction as strong as memory can give, that I, the same identical person who remember that event, did then exist.³⁹

A memory is a conscious mental state; that is, it is directed towards the event that was presented in a past apprehension. "Now, consciousness of what is past, can signify nothing else but the remembrance that I did it."⁴⁰ According to Reid, the objects of memory are the events presented in past apprehensions. Memory preserves past apprehensions by relating us to the events originally presented in perception. And, as in perception, the objects of memory are not mental states, such as ideas, perceptions, or thoughts. In other words, according to Reid, the object of my memory is not the past apprehension itself, but rather that which is presented in the past apprehension, namely the original event.

Suppose that once, and only once, I smelled a tuberose in a certain room where it grew in a pot, and gave a very grateful perfume. Next day I relate what I saw and smelled. When I attend as carefully as I can to what passes in my mind in this case, it appears evident, that the very thing I saw yesterday, and the fragrance I smelled, are now the immediate objects of my mind when I remember it.⁴¹

In memory, according to Reid, I do not currently apprehend an event already presented in an original apprehension. In other words, I do not remember an event *by re-apprehending it*. Rather, by the act of remembering, the original apprehension is itself preserved. The relation involved in memory is preservation—preservation through conception and belief. Such preservation does not itself constitute an additional apprehension over and above the apprehension preserved. Indeed, the preservation relation *cannot* constitute an additional apprehension either of a past apprehension or of what was presented in the past apprehension. According to Reid, I cannot currently apprehend *any* events in the past, if, by 'apprehension', we mean the sort of relation typically secured in perception.

The immediate object of perception must be something present, and not what is past. We may remember what is past, but do not perceive it . . . when the word *perception* is used properly, and without any figure, it is never applied to things past. And thus it is distinguished from remembrance.⁴²

It is by memory that we have an immediate knowledge of things past: The senses give us information of things only as they exist in the present moment; and this information, if it were not preserved

by memory, would vanish instantly, and leave us ignorant as if it had never been.⁴³

My brother and I are drinking a bottle of fine wine. In doing so we apprehend the wine and our drinking of the wine. The next day, when we speak about the quality of the wine, my brother and I apprehend neither the wine nor our drinking it—however we may wish—the wine and our drinking it are in the past. But we remember the wine and remember drinking it. Some commentators hold that Reid's notion of conception, which he holds is a constituent of all intentional mental states, is always a kind of apprehension.⁴⁴ But if we understand Reid's notion of conception as it figures in memory, as a kind of apprehension, it saddles Reid with the implausible view that past events and objects become present by the act of memory. Norman Malcolm describes well the temptation to read Reid's view in this way.

I have the impression . . . perhaps unjust, that Reid wants to say . . . that the odor I smelled yesterday *now* "exists in my mind" or "in my memory." If nothing else were meant than that I remember *that odor*, then well and good. But one wonders whether Reid was struggling to say something more—namely, that yesterday's odor, or the sensation of it, is there, in my mind, *now*.⁴⁵

In fact, Reid insists that memory is to be distinguished from perception precisely by the fact that in perception the object or event perceived is *present to the mind*, i.e., apprehended, whereas the events we remember are past rather than present and so cannot be objects of a current apprehension. Andy Hamilton has argued that interpreting Reid as holding that memory provides a direct awareness of the past undermines Reid's distinction between memory and perception. "This misconception renders Reid's vital analogy between memory and perception quite incredible, since it regards him as claiming an awareness of objects that no longer exist—what one might call the 'telescope into the past' view of memory."⁴⁶ And yet, Reid does not deny that a *memory is a current mental state*. Nor does he deny that *memory presupposes a past apprehension*. He denies only that *memory is a current apprehension*, and that the *object of a memory is a past apprehension*.

Every man can distinguish the thing remembered from the remembrance of it. We may remember any thing which we have seen, or heard, or known, or done, or suffered; but the remembrance of it is a particular act of the mind which now exists, and of which we are conscious.⁴⁷

By interpreting Reid as holding that there is a distinction between the conception ingredient in memory and the previous apprehension preserved by the act of memory, we may understand how Reid is able

to account for memory in terms of previous, rather than present awareness or apprehension, and thus retain his distinction between memory and perception. Memory preserves past apprehension by conceiving of an event previously apprehended and believing, of this event, that it happened.⁴⁸

Reid holds that the conception and belief ingredient in memory are immediate. Memory is immediate, according to Reid, because both the conception and the belief formed about the object presented in the conception are not formed on the basis of reasoning or testimony. Rather, memory is an original faculty of our constitution governed by first principles of contingent truths, such as that “those things did really happen which I distinctly remember.”⁴⁹

If we compare the evidence of sense with that of memory, we find a great resemblance, but still some difference. I remember distinctly to have dined yesterday with such company. What is the meaning of this? It is, that I have a distinct conception and firm belief of this past event; not by reasoning, not by testimony, but immediately from my constitution: And I give the name of memory to that part of my constitution, by which I have this kind of conviction of past events.⁵⁰

According to Reid, I do not and need not infer to a past event in episodic memory. In episodic memory I preserve past apprehension of an event. If, in episodic memory, I make an inference to the effect that the event did occur, such an inference must be based on some prior, non-inferential cognitive relation to the event, given that the memory *is* episodic and not semantic. Alternatively, if, in episodic memory, I make an inference to the effect that the event did occur, the inference will be otiose because a belief of the event, that it occurred, is, according to Reid, already an ingredient in episodic memory.

Recall the distinction between semantic memories that bear a relation to episodic memories and semantic memories that do not. To return to the previous examples, my memory that my parents went to college in Omaha is not related to an episodic memory of my parents going to college in Omaha, while my memory that I had dinner with my brother last night is related to my memory of dining with my brother. According to Reid, what I might call my memory that my parents went to college in Omaha is, strictly speaking, not a memory. Rather, Reid claims that it is a belief to the effect that my parents went to college in Omaha. (This belief might be grounded in various ways, but the epistemological questions that might arise here are not Reid’s questions.) But in the second case, I also have a belief, a belief of dining with my brother last night—a belief that it happened to me. This belief, Reid claims, is a non-inferential *constituent* of episodic memory. In having an episodic

memory of dining with my brother, I have a conception of dining with my brother, and believe, of this event—dining with my brother—that it happened to me. Now, one could, in principle, infer from this conception of and belief in the past occurrence of this event to a further belief that the event happened. But to what effect? I already believe that the event happened to me.

Reid is not claiming that I cannot have a semantic memory that I dined with my brother. Reid is claiming that either my belief plays a role in preserving past apprehension, in which case it is ingredient in episodic memory—subject, as is the conception, to the Previous Awareness Condition—or else my belief does not play a role in preserving past apprehension, in which case it is not, strictly speaking, a memory.

The distinction between beliefs that are ingredient in episodic memories and beliefs that are based on, but not ingredient in, episodic memories—both of which can be expressed in semantic memory reports—also explains how we may have a genuine episodic memory that we nevertheless believe to be fallacious. I may genuinely remember dining with my brother last Thanksgiving, but also believe that I did not have that meal because my mother, whose testimony I regard as reliable, claims that my brother spent last Thanksgiving with his in-laws. Here, the episodic memory represents a past event as having happened, and it did happen to me. It represents the past event as having happened because it consists in a conception of the event previously apprehended and a belief of the event that it did happen to me. However, I have a further belief, not ingredient in the memory itself, formed on the basis of testimony that the event did not happen. But even though I have this further belief, my memory continues to represent the event as having happened, and it does so because it is in part constituted by a belief to the effect that it did happen to me. Of course, should my belief that I dined with my brother last Thanksgiving prove false, the mental state of which it is a constituent will fail to be a memory at all.

However, Reid sometimes writes as if belief is not an ingredient in memory, but rather accompanies memory. On such a view, we form beliefs on the basis of memory, but believing is not part of the act of remembering. “Memory is always *accompanied with* the belief of that which we remember, as perception is *accompanied with* the belief of that which we perceive, and consciousness *with the belief* of that whereof we are conscious.”⁵¹ If we interpret Reid’s theory in this way—call it the ‘accompaniment’ interpretation—memory is a simple, rather than complex, mental state consisting solely in a conception of a past event of which one was either agent or witness. A belief that this event happened arises on occasions of conceiving of past events “as the result of

our constitution.”⁵² On this interpretation, memory relates us to past events by conception alone and beliefs are formed on the basis of memory. If one asks, why we believe in the occurrence of those events that we remember, the answer appeals to “an original faculty given us by the Author of our being, of which we can give no account, but that we are so made.”⁵³ We simply believe.

But Reid also claims that belief is not just an accompaniment of memory but also a constituent of memory.

I proceed to observe, that there are many operations of mind in which, when we analyse them as far as we are able, we find belief to be *an essential ingredient*. A man cannot be conscious of his own thoughts, without believing that he thinks. He cannot perceive an object of sense, without believing that it exists. He cannot distinctly remember a past event without believing that it did exist. Belief therefore is *an ingredient* in consciousness, in perception, and in remembrance.⁵⁴

If we interpret Reid’s theory in this way—call it the ‘constitutive’ interpretation—memory is a complex mental state consisting of a conception of a past event of which one was either witness or agent, and a belief of this same event, that it happened. The constitutive interpretation allows for cases in which a memory continues to represent an event as having happened even though the person remembering the event has what she regards as another overriding reason to believe that the event did not occur.⁵⁵

The constitutive interpretation is preferable to the accompaniment interpretation because by it, Reid fulfills a constraint on any adequate theory of memory; namely, it explains why memory represents events as having the special quality of being in the past. The attendance interpretation explains why we *believe* that the events we remember are in the past. But it cannot explain why *memory* represents these events as past because it does not regard the belief that event occurred as constitutive of *memory*. According to the accompaniment interpretation, memory relates us to an event previously apprehended, alone. Notice, however, that the apprehension preserved is apprehension of an event that was, at that time, represented in that apprehension, as present. The pastness of the event apprehended is not part of the content of the past apprehension. However, if a belief that the event presented in the past apprehension happened is partly constitutive of memory, memory represents not merely past events, but past events as having occurred. The belief that is ingredient in memory is tensed. On the constitutive interpretation, if we ask why we believe in the occurrence of those events of which we were either agent or witness, we need not simply answer: because we are so made. Rather, we believe in the occurrence

of those events of which we were either agent or witness because we *remember* them.

We might stop to wonder whether Reid has not hoisted himself with his own petard. First, Reid holds that memory is preserved past apprehension. Does this notion of preservation not itself appeal to the storehouse metaphor? Second, like Locke, Reid holds that memory is partly constituted by a belief. Does Reid's account of memory also beg the question? Reid avoids his own criticisms of the account of memory given by the theory of ideas by insisting that memory is not a current apprehension, but rather a preserved past apprehension. Memory is not directed towards any present perceptions or events, stored or otherwise. Neither is it directed towards any past *perceptions*, stored or otherwise. Rather, memory is directed towards the events presented in previous perceptions. Because perceptions (apprehensions) are never the objects of memory, they need not be stored for use as an object of memory. One need not retain one's perception of an event in order to preserve the cognitive contact with that event afforded by one's previous perception.

Likewise, the belief that is ingredient in memory, on Reid's theory, is not a belief about any present or past perceptions or apprehensions. If it were, Reid's theory would be subject to the same kind of circularity objection he presses against Locke. Rather, an apprehension establishes cognitive contact with an event, which contact is preserved in memory through conceiving of that past event, and believing of that event that it happened. Reid recognizes that this distinction between the model of memory as current apprehension of a past event—be it an event in the world, or a mental event, such as perceiving—and the model of memory as preserved past apprehension, is central to his parting of ways with the theory of ideas.

Philosophers indeed tell me, that the immediate object of my memory . . . is . . . an idea . . . that this idea now exists in my mind, or in my sensorium; and the mind contemplating this present idea, finds it a representation of what is past . . . and accordingly calls it memory. This is the doctrine of the ideal theory. . . . Upon the strictest attention, memory appears to me to have things that are past, and not present, for its objects.⁵⁶

IV. CONCLUSION

According to Reid, memory is neither a current apprehension of a past event, nor a current apprehension of a past apprehension. Memory preserves past apprehension of an event through a conception of the event previously apprehended and a belief of the event that it happened. The force of this theory is best illuminated by contrast to the theory of ideas,

which theory holds that memory informs us not of past events but past experiences. Gareth Evans describes the crucial difference between these competing theories of memory.

It is frequently said that memory provides us, in the first instance, with information about our past experiences; but this is certainly quite wrong about the kind of operation of memory that I have just described: we no more have, in memory, information which is primarily about our past experiences than we have, in perception, information which is primarily about our present experiences. Just as perception must be regarded as a capacity of gaining information about the world, so memory must be regarded as a capacity for retaining information about the world.⁵⁷

Reid's theory of memory captures how memory, like perception, represents the world rather than our experience of the world. We experience the world by perceiving it and by remembering our path through it.⁵⁸

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NOTES

1. Reid's views regarding the role of memory in personal identity have been treated extensively in the secondary literature and will not be the concern of this paper. See René Van Woudenberg, "Reid on Memory and the Identity of Persons," *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. Terence Cuneo and René Van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); René Van Woudenberg, "Thomas Reid on Memory," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1999), pp. 117–133; Harry Lesser, "Reid's Criticism of Hume's Theory of Personal Identity," *Hume Studies*, vol. 4 (1978), pp. 41–63; Daniel Robinson, "Personal Identity: Reid's Answer to Hume," *Monist*, vol. 61, no. 2 (1978), pp. 326–339; and Andrew Ward, "Reid on Personal Identity: Some Comparisons with Locke and Kant," *Reid Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2000), pp. 55–64.

2. Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. Derek R. Brookes, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), p. 280; hereafter, *EIP*. James Harris, *Hermes or a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Universal Grammar*, 2nd edn rev. and corr. (London, 1765), Book 3, 358, n. (d). Harris's reference: "Alex. Aphrod. De Anima, p. 135. b. Edit Ald." Reid mentions Aristotle by name in his essay on memory in connection with the shortness of children's memory and with the distinction between memory and reminiscence. Reid, *EIP* 280, 293–294. Given Aristotle's enormous authority, even in the eighteenth century, it is likely that Reid would have been familiar with his little Treatise

on Memory. However, Reid's knowledge of Aristotle's writings has not been explored by Reid scholars.

3. Reid, *EIP* 281.
4. Reid, *EIP* 281. See also, Reid, *EIP* Essay II, chapter 4.
5. Reid, *EIP* 281. Reid argues that there are no necessary connections among impressions and memories that would be sufficient to assign impressions as causes of memory.
6. Reid, *EIP* 283. Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, in *The Works of Thomas Reid*, ed. Sir William Hamilton, 8th edition (Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 1983), p. 527. Thomas Reid, "Of Power," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 51 (2001), p. 7. Thomas Reid, *The Correspondence of Thomas Reid*, ed. Paul Wood (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 127, 143, 412.
7. Reid, *EIP* 282. Here Reid refers to impressions on the brain and so targets his contemporaries rather than Aristotle. However, Reid holds that the theory of impressions originates in Aristotle's theory of the sensorium.
8. For a defense of the Lockean theory of memory against Reid's criticisms, see David Owens, "A Lockean Theory of Memory," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 56, no. 2 (1996), pp. 319–332. Renewed interest in Reid's contribution to modern theories of mind is recent. As a result, Reid's criticisms of the ideal theory of memory have received little attention from Locke and Hume scholars
9. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Niddich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 150. Book II.x.1–2.
10. Reid, *EIP* 284–285.
11. Reid, *EIP* 285.
12. *Ibid.*
13. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.11. 1.1.3.1.
14. Reid, *EIP* 288.
15. Reid, *EIP* 289.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Derek Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 197. Hereafter, *IHM*.
18. Reid, *EIP* 476.
19. Endel Tulving, *Elements of Episodic Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).
20. M. G. F Martin, "Out of the Past: Episodic Recall as Retained Acquaintance," *Time and Memory*, ed. Christoph Hoerl and Teresa McCormack (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 261.

21. Sydney Shoemaker, "Persons and their Pasts," *Identity Cause and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). Norman Malcolm, *Memory and Mind* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977).

22. I am grateful to Sydney Shoemaker for pointing out that although the Previous Awareness Condition on episodic memory is not a condition on semantic memory, semantic memories must be subject to a different Previous Awareness Condition. If I remember that the Red Sox won the World Championship in 2004, I must have previously known this fact; if I did not previously know this fact, my belief that the Red Sox won in 2004 would not be a memory.

23. Tulving, *Elements of Episodic Memory*, p. 17.

24. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1911). Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1921).

25. Martin, "Out of the Past," p. 265.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Reid, *EIP* 255. In the example of the birthday party mentioned above, I was witness to the original event, though I no longer remember that event. The Previous Awareness condition is necessary but insufficient for episodic memory.

28. Reid, *EIP* 264.

29. Reid, *EIP* 476.

30. Reid, *EIP* 264.

31. Reid, *EIP* 232. See also *EIP* 227–228, 254.

32. Reid, *EIP* 253.

33. Reid, *IHM* 27, 28.

34. Reid, *EIP* 228, 232, 254, 257.

35. Reid, *EIP* 254, 259, 260. A referee posed a question concerning whether Reid holds that we can remember non-events such as "growing up in Riverside." I take this as a disguised case of factual rather than episodic memory, both of which will be explored below.

36. Reid, *EIP* 96; *IHM* 74, 177.

37. Reid, *IHM* 28–29, 38; *EIP* 227–228, 232, 254–255.

38. Reid, *EIP* 227–228. "Belief must have an object. For he that believes, must believe something; and that which he believes is called the object of his belief. Of this object of his belief, he must have some conception . . . there can be no belief without conception."

39. Reid, *EIP* 255. See also *EIP* 262.

40. Reid, *IHM* 17.

41. Reid, *IHM* 28.

42. Reid, *EIP* 23.
43. Reid, *EIP* 253.
44. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Thomas Reid's Account of the Objectivated Character of Perception," *Reid Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2000), pp. 3–16. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
45. Norman Malcolm, *Memory and Mind* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 31–32.
46. Andy Hamilton, "'Scottish Common Sense' about Memory: A Defense of Thomas Reid's Direct Knowledge Account," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 81, no. 2 (2003), p. 231.
47. Reid, *EIP* 253.
48. It is possible to restate this account of Reid's views in the contemporary terminology of *de re* belief.
49. Reid, *EIP* 474. See also *EIP* 232, 254–257, 474–476.
50. Reid, *EIP* 232.
51. Reid, *EIP* 254 (emphasis added.) Some may find that Reid has an exaggerated confidence in the distinction between what is remembered distinctly and what is imagined distinctly.
52. Reid, *EIP* 256.
53. Reid, *EIP* 255.
54. Reid, *EIP* 228. (Emphasis added.)
55. If Reid's point here were the epistemology of memory, he might be concerned about how well the memory is grounded, and hence about the distinction between a defective memory and a fantasy that merely appears to be a memory; but Reid's point here is not epistemological.
56. Reid, *IHM* 28.
57. Gareth Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 239–240.
58. I wish to thank Todd Buras, Sydney Shoemaker, Ryan Nichols, Brian Copenhaver, and the reviewer for their helpful comments on this paper.