§1. Belief and perception

Thomas Reid viewed himself as a philosophical revolutionary. He saw philosophy as having been dominated for over a century prior to his writings by the “ideal system” (IHM 1.7: 23), according to which the intentional objects of perception and thought are mental particulars rather than ordinary material objects. Reid sought to rebut arguments against (what he took to be) the commonsense position: perception makes us immediately aware of the external world and thereby justifies quotidian beliefs about people, tables, chairs, and so on.

Reid’s aim was not solely to critique his predecessors, however. He also advanced a positive view about the structure of perception. He advocated for what A. D. Smith has called a “dual-component theory” (Smith 2002: 67), on which perceptual experience is a complex of sensation and belief. Reid’s dual-component theory (hereafter “DCT”) is unpopular in contemporary philosophy. While some philosophers balk at the positing of nonconceptual sensory states (e.g., McDowell 1994), the real albatross of DCT is often taken to be the claim that perceptual experience requires belief. Indeed, according to Reid, while sensations invariably figure in our perceptual experiences, they are extrinsic to perception proper, which he understands as ‘conception and belief’ (e.g., EIP 2.17: 210). DCT is thus a doxastic theory of perception.

The doxastic element of Reid’s DCT is seen as sufficiently problematic that there is some controversy in the secondary literature on what to make of it. Some argue that Reid’s theory should be modified by substituting ‘represent’ or similar terms for ‘believe’ (Pelser 2010; Van Cleve 2015b). Others claim that when Reid used ‘believe’ he in fact meant something closer to ‘represent’ or ‘predicate’ (Copenhaver 2010; 2016). Even theorists who defend Reid’s theory of perception in other respects tend to downplay or ignore entirely the doxastic element (Quilty-Dunn 2013b; Buras 2014).

1. As Rebecca Copenhaver (2016: 219) points out, Reid did not use the term ‘perceptual experience’, following Copenhaver. I use the term to refer to the complex of sensation and perception (which Reid did not name). Moreover, Reid may have allowed that the perception of visible figure occurred without any corresponding sensation (IHM 6.8: 101), though I will put aside this special case (see Yaffe 2003 for a critique of this interpretation).
Why is the doxastic aspect of Reid’s DCT so problematic? A core issue is the problem of known illusions. Known illusions are cases where things visually appear one way while we know, at the same time, that they are not that way. Some contemporary philosophers take the existence of known illusions to constitute a kind of one-sentence refutation of all classical doxastic theories (e.g., Siegel 2016, Section 2.2). After all, if you know how a Müller-Lyer illusion works, then you believe that the lines are not really different lengths — and yet the contrary visual appearance persists. The motivating idea is that, once you believe the lines are equal, it is impossible that you still have the contrary belief. Some contemporary theorists attracted to DCT reject the Reidian doxastic requirement and instead replace the notion of perceptual belief with a notion of perceptual “seemings.” Berit Brogaard, for instance, writes that “visual seemings clearly are not belief states. You can believe that p even if it visually seems to you that not-p” (Brogaard 2014: 383).

The goal of this paper will be to illuminate Reid’s commitments with respect to how we form perceptual beliefs. I will argue that we do not need to reinterpret Reidian perceptual belief as some other non-doxastic form of representation, nor is Reid’s DCT easily refuted by the problem of known illusions. For Reid, there are perceptual routes to belief formation that function independently of background knowledge and are thus liable to persist despite contradicting other beliefs. The textual evidence, moreover, strongly suggests that by ‘belief’ he genuinely meant belief rather than some less committal notion such as mere representation or predication.

After showing how Reid’s theory addresses the problem of known illusions, I will briefly consider some of the other problems that have been raised for charitably interpreting Reid’s DCT as properly doxastic. I will argue that a proper understanding of the role of perceptual belief eliminates incompatibility with background knowledge in such cases.

2. I say ‘classical’ because the problem of known illusions arguably doesn’t arise for Glüer (2009), for instance, since the semantics she offers for perceptual belief eliminates incompatibility with background knowledge in such cases.

routes to belief formation in Reid’s theory may serve to assuage these worries as well as the problem of known illusions.

§2. Perceptual-belief formation

What distinguishes perceptual beliefs from other sorts of beliefs, according to Reid, is that the former are suggested “immediately” by sensations (IHM 2.7: 37). That is, perceptual beliefs are “not the effect of reasoning” (EIP 2.5: 96) but are rather suggested by sensations due to “a law of our constitution” (IHM 5.2: 56). While Reid does seem pessimistic that such laws can be fully understood (EIP 2.5: 100–101), I aim to take seriously Reid’s claim that the process of perceptual-belief formation is “immediate” and read it as a positive proposal rather than a confession of ignorance. If Reid has nothing to say about how the belief component of perception is formed, then he has no possible way of responding to the problem of known illusions. In that case, it is both charitable and interpretively useful to take Reid’s statements as positive proposals about perceptual-belief formation.

A few questions immediately pop up for any proposal about a mental process:

(1) What kinds of inputs normally trigger the process?

(2) What kinds of outputs does it normally generate?

(3) What states mediate inputs and outputs?

(4) What factors can alter its functioning (i.e., can change the answers to 1–3), either at a single time or across time?

3. Two caveats are necessary. First, there is some controversy about whether to read Reid’s usage of ‘suggest’ in causal terms (Copenhaver 2004), but for simplicity’s sake the causal reading is assumed. Nothing should hang on this—talk of proprietary causal mechanisms of perceptual-belief formation could instead be replaced by talk of proprietary sequences of suggestion that link perceptual beliefs to sensations or impressions. Second, Reid did not offer a theory of what belief is beyond the holding of something to be true (Pelser 2010), so I’ll assume that belief is an affirmative relation to a propositional content.
Focusing on ‘original’ perception, Reid’s answer to 1 is, depending on one’s interpretation, either sensations or the “material impressions” (i.e., proximal stimulations) that cause sensations — but for the sake of concreteness, I’ll assume that the inputs to perceptual-belief formation are sensations.

Reid’s answer to 2 is a matter of some controversy. Rebecca Copenhaver (2010; 2016) has argued that, while he uses the term ‘belief’, he intends only to claim that perception involves some predicative element. On Copenhaver’s interpretation, Reid’s claim that perception proper consists of conception and belief should be understood as follows: “the conception provides a non-conceptual presentation of an object and the belief predicates features of the object conceived, by way of concept-application” (2010, 291).

The textual evidence, however, goes against the predicative interpretation of the belief component of Reid’s DCT. He often does not merely use the term ‘belief’, but writes of perception as involving “firm” belief (IHM 5:2: 57; EIP 2.20: 226; EIP 2.20: 230; EIP 2.20: 232; EIP 6:1: 409), or “strong and irresistible” belief (EIP 2.5: 96). Given his claim that belief admits of degrees of firmness, the fact that perception involves not only belief but firm belief suggests that, for Reid, the belief component of perception is genuine (and strong) belief. Indeed, he also writes of the belief component of perception as a “conviction” (EIP 1:1: 22, 24; EIP 1:2: 42; EIP 2:5: 96, 97, 99, 101; EIP 2:16: 194, 199, 200; EIP 2.20: 231, 232), which seems stronger than mere predication.

Here is an illustrative passage:

I see a chair on my right hand. What is the meaning of this? It is, that I have, by my constitution, a distinct conception and firm belief of the present existence of the chair in such a place, and in such a position; and I give the name of seeing to that part of my constitution, by which I have this immediate conviction. (EIP 2.20: 232)

Reid explicitly compares the belief component of perception to belief in mathematical or logical axioms, in virtue of both the strength of the belief involved as well as its functioning as a premise in inference (EIP 2.5: 100; EIP 2.20: 231, 233). Indeed, he writes that perception “commands my belief no less than an axiom” (EIP 2.20: 231). Reid’s use of language is careful and systematic; if he were using the term ‘belief’ in two completely different senses while making this comparison, one would expect him to disambiguate. He seems instead explicitly to say that belief is involved in perception in just the same sense that it is involved in non-perceptual thought (such as mathematical cognition). The textual evidence thus makes it highly plausible that Reid takes perception to involve genuine belief.

The answer to question 2 should therefore be that the output of a perceptual-belief formation process is a genuine belief that functions as a constituent of a perceptual experience.

The answers to questions 3 and 4 are a bit more complicated. In the literature critical of the doxastic aspect of Reid’s DCT (Smith 2002; Pelser 2010; Van Cleve 2015a; 2015b) as well as the philosophy of perception more generally, the assumption seems to be that the states that mediate (sensory) inputs and (doxastic) outputs include some or all background beliefs. Altering background beliefs can therefore suffice to alter the perceptual beliefs formed at a time. If this assumption is true, then which perceptual beliefs we form on a given occasion will be determined not only by which sensations we currently experience and what we know about how things look — e.g., that tigers have stripes, so certain types of stripe-ish visual sensations result in the perceptual belief that there is a tiger over there — but also anything else we may believe about the specific situation.

We can name this assumption:

**BACKGROUND:** The process of perceptual-belief formation that takes sensory states as inputs and delivers

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4. See Van Cleve 2004 for helpful discussion and diagrams.

5. He similarly writes of memory as involving ‘firm’ belief in the past existence of some object (EIP 2.20, 232; EIP 3:2: 255; EIP 3.2: 258).
perceptual beliefs as outputs has access to relevant background beliefs.\textsuperscript{6}

To illustrate with an example: Someone with intimate knowledge of pine trees might experience certain visual sensations and form the perceptual belief that there is a pine tree over there. According to \textsc{background}, convincing her that she is on the holodeck of the USS Enterprise looking at a hologram and that there are no actual pine trees in the vicinity should shortcut the typical perceptual-belief formation process (Siegel 2010: 104ff).

The idea that we lack the illusory perceptual belief in cases of known illusions requires the truth of \textsc{background}. If our background belief that the Müller-Lyer lines are equal is accessible by the perceptual-belief formation process, then we should expect that the perceptual belief that one is longer than the other will not be formed. If we reject \textsc{background}, on the other hand, then the perceptual-belief formation process will proceed without being checked against the rest of our beliefs. In that case, the background belief cannot penetrate the perceptual-belief formation process, and the process will sustain the illusory belief. The process will have some proprietary store of information relevant to the conceptualization of sensed objects, and once this information has been accessed, the process will proceed to the formation of a perceptual belief \textit{whether or not that perceptual belief is incompatible with beliefs housed elsewhere in the mind}.

We can name this alternate assumption:

\textsc{impenetrability}: The process of perceptual-belief formation that takes sensory states as inputs and delivers perceptual beliefs as outputs does not access relevant background beliefs and instead has an encapsulated, proprietary store of information.\textsuperscript{7}

To return to the pine-tree example: According to \textsc{impenetrability}, if someone with intimate knowledge of pine trees experiences certain visual sensations that lead her to form the perceptual belief that there is a pine tree over there, convincing her that she is looking at a hologram and that there are no actual pine trees in the vicinity should have no immediate effect on the perceptual-belief formation process. We suppose she acquires, via testimony, a belief with the content \textit{<there are no pine trees here>}, which is semantically relevant to the perceptual belief with the content \textit{<that is a pine tree over there>}. But if \textsc{impenetrability} is true, then the content of the former belief is outside the domain of information available to the perceptual-belief formation process.

The disagreement between \textsc{background} and \textsc{impenetrability} is at bottom a disagreement about mental architecture — that is, about how information is organized in the mind. \textsc{impenetrability} claims that there is an architectural border between the information accessible by the perceptual-belief formation process and the rest of the information in the mind, including all of one’s background beliefs. \textsc{background}, on the other hand, holds that all relevant background beliefs fall within the informational purview of the perceptual-belief formation process. There must be \textit{some} information available to the perceptual-belief formation process, even \textsc{on impenetrability}, because the process must be capable of conceptualizing distal stimuli on the basis of unconceptualized sensory states. For example, certain visual sensations might yield the perceptual belief that there is a tiger over there. In that case, whatever process took those visual sensations as inputs and delivered that perceptual belief must possess, implicitly or explicitly, the information required to recognize tigers — information such as the fact that tigers are orange, that they are striped, etc. While this information need not

\textsuperscript{6} I add ‘relevant’ since proponents of \textsc{background} may not want to endorse the claim that the process of perceptual-belief formation requires combing through all of our background beliefs, but only those that are relevant. What exactly “relevance” amounts to, and how the formation process can tell which beliefs are relevant in a context without already combing through all of them, are unanswered questions.

\textsuperscript{7} As will become clear below, this condition requires encapsulation \textit{at a time}, not necessarily across time.
be explicitly represented and may simply be instantiated in the regular operations of the process (as Reid would no doubt insist), the information must be present in some form or other to account for the reliable formation of perceptual beliefs about tigers in the presence of tigers.

Now that the conceptual space is clearer, two questions present themselves: First, was Reid committed to either background of impenetrability? And second, which thesis is more plausible on Reidian grounds?

I propose to interpret Reid as committed (at least implicitly) to impenetrability. The difference between the two theses, and where Reid falls, can be understood by seeing how they relate to inference. Since background and impenetrability differ only with respect to architecture, it’s compatible with both that the processes that underlie perceptual-belief formation are inferential (in which case the inferences on impenetrability will be limited to a small subset of beliefs). But as we’ll presently see, holding that those processes are noninferential seems to cut in favor of impenetrability rather than background.

For Reid, perceptual beliefs are formed immediately, by which he means that “it is not by a train of reasoning and argumentation” (EIP 2.5: 99) that we form perceptual beliefs—that is, perceptual-belief formation is noninferential. One of the hallmarks of inferential processes of belief acquisition is rational mediation by other beliefs. To borrow an example from Paul Boghossian (2014), suppose that upon waking up in the morning you look outside, see the wet streets, and infer that it rained. Plausibly, what happens in such case is an inferential transition from the beliefs (i) that the streets are wet and (ii) if the streets are wet then it rained, to the belief (iii) that it rained. The formation of (iii) on the basis of (i) was thus mediated by (ii). In general, if one acquires a belief through inference, the acquisition is mediated by other beliefs. Furthermore, this mediation is rational in the sense that the formal and/or semantic properties of the mediating beliefs explain the formation of the acquired belief—in Boghossian’s example, for instance, it’s because (i) and (ii) satisfy the antecedent of the modus ponens rule that they trigger the formation of (iii) (Quilty-Dunn & Mandelbaum 2018).

Reid holds that the perceptual-belief formation process is noninferential, and thus does not involve the kind of rational mediation by beliefs characteristic of inference. But to say that a process is noninferential is simply to deny that it is inferential, which does not carry much positive information about the nature of the process. Reid’s claim that certain sensations “suggest” certain perceptual beliefs “by a law of our constitution” is not very informative either. Perhaps, in that case, perceptual-belief formation for Reid is noninferential but nonetheless has access to all relevant background beliefs. While this possibility is not inconceivable, however, it does not seem well-motivated. If the process is noninferential, it is not clear how it could incorporate background beliefs.

Think again about the pine-tree case. On background, what happens once the subject learns that there are no pine trees nearby? Somehow, that belief worms its way into the perceptual-belief formation process and prevents the formation of the belief that there is a pine tree over there. Though proponents of background typically don’t offer accounts of how this infiltration of background beliefs into the perceptual-belief formation process is supposed to work, it seems that it would be carried out in the following way. First, the perceptual-belief formation process is disposed to output the perceptual belief that there is a pine tree over there, but the subject believes that there are no pine trees nearby; second, this background belief entails that it is not the case that there is a pine tree over there, which contradicts the presumptive perceptual belief; and finally, since the perceptual-belief formation process has access to the background belief, the contradiction of the presumptive perceptual belief with the background belief prevents the former from being formed.

8. This view of Reid’s is compatible with holding that the relevant process is inferential in the weaker sense that it involves solving an undetermination problem. I use the term “inference” (as Reid did as well—see, e.g., EIP 2.7: 105) to refer to reasoning with beliefs rather than unconscious perceptual computations (cf. Helmholtz 1867/1962). Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this point.
It is hard to see how this process could be construed as noninferential. There is clearly a rational connection between the presumptive perceptual belief and the relevant background beliefs. Moreover, this rational connection figures directly in the cancellation of the presumptive perceptual belief. Compare the case where A considers whether it rained recently: A believes that if it rained recently, the streets will be wet; A looks outside and sees that the streets are not wet; so A doesn’t believe that it rained recently. This case of modus tollens reasoning seems to mirror the story of how background beliefs infiltrate the perceptual-belief formation process in the pine-tree case according to BACKGROUND. It just isn’t clear how background beliefs could rationally mediate the formation of perceptual beliefs in the way BACKGROUND requires without their being elements of an inferential process the conclusion of which is the allowance or cancellation of a presumptive perceptual belief. So the most natural way to cash out BACKGROUND — and the only one on the table thus far — is that the perceptual-belief formation process is a form of reasoning that takes all relevant background beliefs as (at least possible) premises.

Given Reid’s emphatic rejection of any role for inference in the production of perceptual beliefs, therefore, we may conclude that Reid rejects BACKGROUND in favor of IMPEPENETRABILITY. Since the problem of known illusions only gets off the ground if BACKGROUND is assumed and IMPEPENETRABILITY is rejected, Reid’s theory has the resources to block the problem of known illusions at the source: The perceptual-belief formation process proceeds independently of what else we believe, and that process kicks out the perceptual belief that the lines in the Müller-Lyer are unequal despite the contrary belief.

9. There’s a disanalogy between this case and the pine-tree case: in this case, one not only doesn’t acquire the belief that it rained recently, but one also acquires the belief that it didn’t rain recently, whereas in the pine-tree case, one doesn’t form the perceptual belief that there’s a pine tree over there but (presumably) doesn’t form the perceptual belief that there is no pine tree over there. Thus the modus tollens form can suffice, on BACKGROUND, to block the formation of the relevant perceptual belief without leading to the formation of its negation. This special feature of the perceptual-belief formation process doesn’t seem to affect the point at issue.

It seems that Reid endorsed IMPEPENETRABILITY rather than BACKGROUND, and on grounds that many contemporary philosophers might accept. For instance, Laurence Bonjour writes:

I do not infer that there is a red book on the desk, nor does the belief result from any other sort of deliberative or ratiocinative process, whether explicit or implicit. Rather it simply occurs to me, “strikes me,” in a manner which is both involuntary and quite coercive; such a belief is, I will say, cognitively spontaneous. It is cognitive spontaneity which marks the belief as putatively observational[.] (Bonjour 1985: 117; emphasis his.)

Bonjour claims that the phenomenology of perceptual beliefs suggests that they are formed noninferentially and automatically, and Bonjour and others (Lyons 2005; Egan 2008) put this hypothesis to work in the epistemology of perception. It doesn’t seem that you have to reason your way to the belief that there is something white in front of you — rather, the belief simply strikes you. Philosophers who accept this intuition will be likely to reject the claim that there is any occurrent rational mediation by other beliefs and will therefore reject BACKGROUND in favor of IMPEPENETRABILITY.

One might object that the foregoing discussion does not adequately answer the intuitive bite of the problem of known illusions, viz., that it simply seems implausible that we believe that the lines are unequal when we look at the Müller-Lyer. The view suggested by IMPEPENETRABILITY — that we do in fact have this belief despite the background belief that the lines are equal — is indeed counterintuitive. Reid (as well as Bonjour and others who accept IMPEPENETRABILITY) could insist in turn that, insofar as BACKGROUND entails that perceptual beliefs are formed via reasoning, their opponents are committed to counterintuitive views as well. If the debate were not to devolve into warring intuitions, however, it would fall to Reid to explain away the intuition that
we lack illusory beliefs in known-illusion cases (or to his opponent to explain away the intuition that perceptual-belief formation involves no reasoning).

Reid has independent reasons to doubt that we can easily distinguish perceptual beliefs through introspection. Despite his commitment to grounding philosophy in common sense, he also insists that “philosophy teaches us […] to distinguish things which the vulgar confound” (EIP 2.22: 247). According to Reid, we typically fail to pull apart the sensory components of perceptual experience from the perceptual awareness of the external object provided by the conception-and-belief component. We are “accustomed to comprehend both sensation and perception under one name, and to consider them as one uncompounded operation” (EIP 2.26: 200; see also IHM 2.8: 40). This suggests that, for Reid, we typically introspect on our experiences with coarse-grained categories like seeing rather than readily making more fine-grained distinctions. On this sort of view, it is unsurprising that we sometimes fail to recognize the doxastic aspect of perception as such. Instead, the doxastic aspect of perception gets introspectively lumped into the state of seeing the lines as unequal. Thus Reid can invoke impenetrability to explain why the illusory belief persists, and can invoke the coarseness of introspection to explain why it seems counterintuitive to say so.11

§3. Acquired perceptual belief

One more wrinkle needs to be ironed out for Reid’s reply to the problem of known illusions to be coherent. As we’ve seen, Reid is committed to impenetrability; he rejects the idea that background beliefs rationally mediate perceptual-belief formation; and he needs the perceptual-belief formation process to have a limited, proprietary store of information about the perceptible world. This might suggest that mappings of sensory states to perceptual beliefs must be innate. But one of the most interesting features of Reid’s general account is his distinction between “original” perception, which does proceed according to such innate mappings, and “acquired” perception, which is learned and allows us to perceive high-level properties such as the sound of a coach as such (EIP 2.21; Copenhaver 2010; Quilty-Dunn 2013a; Van Cleve 2015b).

Acquired perception may seem to threaten the present interpretation since it involves an interaction between background beliefs and perceptual beliefs such that the former can become the latter. That is, a person unable to recognize pine trees might nonetheless believe that a tree in front of her is a pine tree, which involves a background belief; but through repeated interaction with pine trees, she may acquire the ability to see it as a pine tree, in which case the belief that there is a pine tree in front of her is not in the background but is an output of the perceptual-belief formation process. Two worries: (a) Isn’t this a form of rational mediation? and (b) Doesn’t this mean the information to which the perceptual-belief formation process has access includes background beliefs?

Answering these worries requires distinguishing synchronic rational mediation and encapsulation from their diachronic counterparts. Synchronic rational mediation would involve a direct intervention of background beliefs at a single time, as background supposes is the regular case for perceptual-belief formation. And the information available to a process is encapsulated synchronically if adding information elsewhere in the mind (e.g., acquiring a new belief through

11. The idea that beliefs can persist despite our failing to attribute them to ourselves, and despite their contradicting other beliefs we hold, is controversial. But there is significant contemporary support for it (Egan 2008; Mandelbaum 2013; Quilty-Dunn 2015). One illustrative example is implicit bias, such as racist beliefs housed by people who believe themselves to be egalitarians. There is even evidence that people have some introspective access to the content of these negative attitudes, despite failing to introspectively categorize them as beliefs (Hahn et al. 2014; see also Mandelbaum 2013: 76–77). Similarly, Reid may insist that people have introspective access to the content of their perceptual experiences despite failing to introspectively categorize them as beliefs.

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testimony or inference) does not make that information available to the process at that time, as impenetrability describes. These features can also be realized diachronically, i.e., across time. Impenetrability holds that perceptual-belief formation is synchronically encapsulated and is not synchronically rationally mediated by background beliefs. It’s compatible with impenetrability that the information to which the perceptual-belief formation process has access can change over time, and that this change might constitute diachronic rational mediation.

What matters for Reid is that the perceiver who is ignorant about pine trees can’t simply infer her way to a perceptual belief about pine trees. She may, through repeated inferences, establish an associative link between certain sensory states and beliefs about pine trees that allows the former to cause the latter in line with impenetrability, in which case she is now capable of perceiving pine trees as such.\(^\text{12}\) As is typical for claims about mental architecture (e.g., Pylyshyn 1999) the core claim is about synchronic interactions of systems and representations, and synchronically rigid borders are compatible with diachronically porous ones.

\section*{\textit{§4}. Other problems}

The main point of the foregoing has been that Reid’s endorsement of impenetrability allows his theory to avoid the problem of known illusions and is independently plausible. There have been other problems raised for the doxastic aspect of Reid’s DCT, however.

\textit{4.1 Unattended perception.}

Adam Pelser (2010) argues that interpretations of Reid should play down the doxastic element of his DCT on grounds that unattended perception occurs without belief.\(^\text{13}\) An example might be turning your head quickly and not realizing until a few seconds later that you just saw a friend down the street. Intuitively, Pelser argues, such cases involve perception but not belief.

It is far from clear, however, that these cases should be so interpreted. While some contemporary philosophers think that conscious perception can occur outside attention (Block 2011), many philosophers and cognitive scientists do not (Dehaene & Naccache 2001; Cohen & Dennett 2011; Prinz 2012). There is little reason therefore to suppose that a doxastic interpretation of Reid’s theory is uncharitable simply on grounds that it rules out unattended conscious perception. On the contrary, that consequence of his theory would be shared by many contemporary theorists.

Moreover, it is not obvious that attention is in fact required for belief. As Pelser himself notes, cases of unattended perception involve “the essential cognitive component(s) of perception, due to [the] ability to recall the perception to mind later” (2010: 364). But if we grant that the perceptual state is not merely sensory but also cognitive, and was held in memory, then there is reason to think that the perceptual state was conceptualized. If we already grant that the perceptual state involved concepts, then it is unclear why Pelser’s argument rules out that it involved belief. One might object that the subject would not report having the belief at the moment of perception. But the subject also would not report having the perception itself, which Pelser supposes she nonetheless has. The fact that the subject fails to notice her perceptual state — including, for Reid, its belief component — is compatible with the perceptual state’s involving an unattended belief.

\textit{12}. A repeated transition from (a) sensory state to (b) original perceptual belief to (c) inferential belief about pine trees can instantiate the associative relation of contiguity between (a) and (c) so that (a) and (c) become associated. Reid’s account of acquired perception is committed to some such process sufficing for (c) to become a type of perceptual belief, and thus for the information required to deploy (c) in response to (a) to fall within the purview of the perceptual-belief formation process. Perhaps in that case Reid allows such associative links to be a way in which the process houses or instantiates information.

\textit{13}. Pelser also discusses “dim” perception, wherein perception is so faint it isn’t clear whether we form the relevant conception and belief. But as Pelser notes, this possibility is raised by Reid himself (EIP 2.5: 107), and it is unclear whether Reid thinks it involves genuine perception. In any case, the point is highly similar to the point about unattended perception.
4.2 Children and animals.

Pelzer also raises the worry that children and animals can perceive and yet fail to have beliefs. But this is a famous objection to any and all accounts of perception on which perception is conceptual. A conceptualist might reply by attributing concepts to children and animals. If it is plausible to attribute concepts to a child, it does not seem any less plausible to attribute beliefs. There is thus no special problem here for the doxastic aspect of Reid’s DCT; rather, the target seems to be all conceptualist accounts of perception.

As an interpretive matter, the conceptualism of Reid’s DCT is non-negotiable. Even Copenhaver’s anti-doxastic interpretation of Reid still invokes concepts in perception (2010: 286).\footnote{As noted above, Copenhaver takes Reidian conception to be nonconceptual (as do others—e.g., Wolterstorff 2001: 19ff; Van Cleve 2015: 17–18). An anonymous referee raises the possibility that even belief need not be conceptual. I assume here that propositional attitudes such as belief constitutively comprise concepts; thus Reid’s DCT is committed to conceptualism. A purely nonconceptual interpretation of Reid’s DCT would avoid Pelzer’s objection entirely. However, such an interpretation would seem incompatible with the textual evidence cited above that Reid sees perceptual belief as the same sort of mental state used in paradigmatically conceptual thought such as the grasping of mathematical truths.} Rejecting not only the doxastic aspect of Reid’s DCT but also the conceptualist aspect is a dramatic revision of Reid’s original view. If successful, Pelzer’s argument would show Reid’s theory to be unsalvageable root and branch; it provides no special argument against interpreting Reid as holding that the conceptual component of perception involves a belief attitude rather than some other attitude.

Reid could respond to the general challenge to conceptualism, furthermore, by arguing that in certain cases, these subjects have mere sensations, and in other cases they have full-blown perceptions involving belief despite their inability to use language. It is also open to him to argue that creatures that lack concepts could have different perceptual capacities. Reid’s aim is to characterize perception in humans. He may not have intended his account to generalize to all perceiving creatures.

4.3 Overgeneration.

James Van Cleve (2004) argues that Reid’s DCT overgenerates cases of perception. One example he raises involves seeing someone’s car keys on the kitchen table and coming noninferentially to believe that that person is in the house. Intuitively, Van Cleve argues, this is not a case of perception; but, he argues further, it seems to satisfy Reid’s conditions for perception. This argument may suggest that we should downplay the role of belief in Reid’s DCT.

There are replies to Van Cleve’s argument in the secondary literature (Copenhaver 2010; 2016; Quilty-Dunn 2013a).\footnote{Van Cleve’s (2015a) own solution, which involves stipulating that perceptual conception is a form of Russelian acquaintance, has the consequence that acquired perception is much rarer than Reid thought.} One reply is that it is plausible to regard visual perception as restricted to one’s visible environment, which might be construed as the array of objects that presently reflect light to the perceiver’s eyes. The person upstairs does not fall within the perceiver’s visible environment so construed.

There is also reason to think that the example would not count as perception for Reid. First, Reid argues that in genuine cases of perception it is difficult to pull apart the different components of perception through introspection (e.g., IHM 2.8: 39–40; EIP 2.26: 200). In Van Cleve’s example, however, we can easily distinguish our belief that the person is home from our perception of the keys.

Second, we can readily provide the reason upon which our belief is based in this case, whereas Reid insists that we can provide no such reason for the beliefs that figure in perception proper (as discussed above—see also IHM 5.2: 58; IHM 5.7: 71–72). If asked why we believe that the person is in the house, we are in a position immediately to cite the presence of their keys as evidence. If asked why we believe the keys are in the house, however, we would respond either with a demonstration (e.g., “They’re right there”) or a direct appeal to our experience (e.g., “I can see them right now”). Van Cleve’s example therefore does not seem to count as genuine perception by Reid’s lights.
§5. Conclusion
Reid has the resources, through impenetrability, to avoid the problem of known illusions. Furthermore, the doxastic interpretation of Reid’s DCT survives problems raised in the secondary literature. There may be many independent reasons to reject doxastic theories of perception, including Reid’s DCT (e.g., Smith 2002). The primary goal of this paper has been not to defend Reid’s theory but rather to show that it is best interpreted as robustly doxastic.16

References

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