

MORAL THEORY

Reid on the first principles of morals

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What role do the first principles of morals play in Reid's moral theory? Reid has an official line regarding their role, which identifies these principles as foundational propositions that evidentially ground other moral propositions. I claim that, by Reid's own lights, this line of thought is mistaken. There is, however, another line of thought in Reid, one which identifies the first principles of morals as constitutive of moral thought. I explore this interpretation, arguing that it is a fruitful way of understanding much of what Reid wants to say about the role of moral first principles and drawing some connections between it and recent work on moral nonnaturalism.

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Toward the end of *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, Reid offers a list of propositions that he calls the first principles of morals, dividing this list into two sections. The first section, Reid says, includes propositions that pertain to 'virtue in general, or to the different particular branches of virtue, or to the comparison of virtues where they seem to interfere' (EAP V.i: 271). They are:

- 1g. There are some things in human conduct, that merit approbation and praise, others that merit blame and punishment; and different degrees either of approbation or of blame, are due to different actions.
- 2g. What is in no degree voluntary can neither deserve moral approbation nor blame.
- 3g. What is done from unavoidable necessity may be agreeable or disagreeable, useful or hurtful, but cannot be the object either of blame or moral approbation.
- 4g. Men may be highly culpable in omitting what they ought to have done, as well as in doing what they ought not.
- 5g. We ought to use the best means we can to be well informed of our duty, by serious attention to moral instruction; by observing what we approve, and what we disapprove, in others and ourselves; by reflecting often on our own past conduct; and by deliberating coolly and impartially upon our future conduct.

6g. It ought to be our most serious concern to do our duty as far as we know it, and to fortify our minds against every temptation to deviate from it; by maintaining a lively sense of the beauty of right conduct, and of its present and future reward, of the turpitude of vice, and of its bad consequences here and hereafter.

The second section of the list, Reid writes, contains those principles that are 'more particular.' They are:

- 1p. We ought to prefer a greater good, though more distant, to a less; and a less evil to a greater.
- 2p. As far as the intention of nature appears in the constitution of man, we ought to comply with that intention, and to act agreeable to it.
- 3p. No man is born for himself only. Every man, therefore, ought to consider himself as a member of the common society of mankind, and of those subordinate societies to which he belongs, such as family, friends, neighborhood, country, and to do as much good as he can, and as little hurt to the societies of which he is a part.
- 4p. In every case, we ought to act that part toward another, which we would judge to be right in him to act toward us, if we were in his circumstances and he in ours.
- 5p. To every man who believes, the existence, the perfections, and the providence of God, the veneration and submission we owe to him is self-evident. (EAP V.i: 272–76)¹

My project in this paper is to address the question of what role, according to Reid, these principles play in ethical thinking. Reid has an official line about their role, which I maintain cannot be correct by Reid's own lights. But there is an unofficial 'constitutivist' line of thought regarding the first principles of morals, also present in Reid's texts, which coheres with the overall pattern of Reid's thinking and is interesting in its own right. After explaining what the official line is and why it should be rejected, I lay out this alternative interpretation, drawing some connections between it and recent work on moral nonnaturalism.

1. Three issues of interpretation

To understand how Reid conceives of the role that the first principles of morals play in ethical thinking, I need first to address several issues of interpretation. The first issue concerns how narrowly Reid understands the domain of morality. In a chapter dedicated to Locke's claim that morality is demonstrable – demonstrable reasoning being 'applied only to truths that are necessary' (EIP VII.i: 545) – Reid raises the following concern about Locke's views:

The propositions which I think are properly called moral, are those that affirm some moral obligation to be, or not to be incumbent on one or more individual persons. To such propositions, Mr LOCKE'S reasoning does not apply, because the subjects of the proposition are not things whose real essence can be perfectly known. They are the creatures of God: their obligation results from the constitution which God has given them, and the circumstances in which he has placed them. That an individual has such a constitution and is placed in such circumstances, is not an abstract and necessary, but a contingent truth. It is a matter of fact, and therefore not capable

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of demonstrative evidence, which belongs only to necessary truths. (EIP VII.ii: 550–551; see also EIP VII.iii: 555).

In this passage, Reid works with a highly restrictive account of what counts as a moral principle. If it were correct, those propositions that tell us what moral reasons, moral rights, or moral virtues a person has would not necessarily count as moral, since they do not concern (and cannot be reductively analyzed in terms of) moral obligations. Moreover, this passage has the implication that some of the principles that Reid himself lists among the first principles of morals would not count as moral. Take, for example, the first three principles listed above. These principles concern not the conditions under which an agent is under a moral obligation, but those under which an agent can rightly be held morally accountable. Since both of these implications are, I believe, ones that Reid would wish to avoid, I am going to interpret Reid as working with a more capacious account of the moral domain than he states in the passage just quoted.

The second issue of interpretation concerns the modal status of the first principles of morals. In the passage just cited, Reid maintains against Locke that the principles of morality are not necessary but contingent. Just several chapters before his engagement with Locke, however, Reid identifies a domain of propositions that he calls the principles of common sense, dividing them into the contingent and the necessary. In the category of the necessary, he places the first principles of morals (EIP VI.vi: 494). It is because some moral principles are necessary, says Reid, that they could not be determined by the operations of the moral sense, which are contingent: 'if it be true that there is judgment in our determinations of taste and of morals, it must be granted, that what is true or false in morals, or in matters of taste, is necessarily so. For this reason, I have ranked the first principles of morals and of taste under the class of necessary truths' (EIP VI.vi: 495).

While it is not immediately apparent how to reconcile these rather different things that Reid says about the modal status of the principles of morals, there is, I believe, a way to harmonize them. The key is to understand Reid as operating with two different notions of necessity that he does not explicitly distinguish. The first is that of absolute necessity, which includes all and only those propositions that are true 'no matter what.' Candidates for the absolutely necessary would be propositions such as *that all bachelors are unmarried* and *that nothing is red and green all over at once*, since they are true but not relative to any set of conditions. Relative necessities, in contrast, are necessarily true but only relative to a set of specified conditions. Candidates for the relatively necessary would be propositions such as *that water freezes at 0 degrees Celsius* and (more controversially) *that Obama = Obama*, since both are necessarily true only relative to certain conditions.² As I understand him, in the passage on Locke, Reid rejects the claim that the first principles of morals are absolutely necessary. But in the passages on the necessary first principles, he accepts the claim that the first principles of morals enjoy relative necessity – the conditions to which they are relative being that of

our existing and having the constitution that we in fact have. At any rate, in what follows, I will assume that Reid holds that the first principles of morals are necessary, albeit only in the relative sense.

The third issue of interpretation regarding Reid's position with respect to the first principles is more challenging, as there is something deeply puzzling about the list he offers us. The list is puzzling not because it is incomplete. Reid is careful to note that he does not pretend to offer a 'complete enumeration' of the first principles (EAP V.i: 270). Nor is the list puzzling because Reid seems to furnish an 'unconnected heap of duties' without providing any clues regarding how they should be weighted in ethical deliberation.³ Rather, the list is puzzling because it is difficult to see how the first principles of morals could guide ethical deliberation and action at all. For unlike Ross's *prima facie* duties, the first principles of morals are not substantive moral principles; with perhaps the exception of principle 5p, they do not identify descriptive features that make it the case that we have one or another obligation, the awareness of which could guide ethical deliberation and action.

Consider, for example, the last of the general principles that Reid lists:

4g. Men may be highly culpable in omitting what they ought to have done, as well as in doing what they ought not.

5g. We ought to use the best means we can to be well informed of our duty, by serious attention to moral instruction; by observing what we approve, and what we disapprove, in others and ourselves; by reflecting often on our own past conduct; by deliberating coolly and impartially upon our future conduct.

6g. It ought to be our most serious concern to do our duty as far as we know it, and to fortify our minds against every temptation to deviate from it; by maintaining a lively sense of the beauty of right conduct, and of its present and future reward, of the turpitude of vice, and of its bad consequences here and hereafter.

Principle 4g does not tell us what ought to be done. 5g does not specify what the duties are about which we should be informed. Likewise, 6g fails to specify what the right conduct is such that we should maintain a lively sense of its beauty. Or, to move to the particular principles, consider:

4p. In every case, we ought to act that part toward another, which we would judge to be right in him to act toward us, if we were in his circumstances and he in ours.

Reid tells us that this principle is the 'most comprehensive,' as it 'comprehends every rule of justice without exception' (EAP V.i: 275). But unless one knows what the right actions are such that others should perform them toward us, this principle is of no help in determining how we should treat others. Since, taken by themselves, these principles could not offer practical ethical guidance, why would Reid offer them as especially vivid cases of moral principles?

The clue, I think, lies in Reid's gloss of principle 4p. In this gloss, Reid says that this principle 'comprehends every rule of justice.'⁴ If this is right, while most of the principles on Reid's list express moral obligations, they are themselves second-order obligations that presuppose the existence of and concern the

existence of other first-order moral obligations – among these first-order principles being the rules of justice. Properly understood, then, most of Reid's first principles are first principles of morals; they are *about* first-order moral principles that are not themselves first-order moral principles. Whether intentional or not, Reid's own way of speaking of the first principles as principles of morality reveals their character.

Does Reid elsewhere say what these other first-order moral principles, such as the rules of justice, might be? Yes, he does, although it must be admitted that connecting what Reid says about the first principles of morals with the rules of justice requires stitching together some texts that Reid himself does not explicitly link. That said, it is worth quoting at length what Reid writes in his discussion of justice:

We may observe, that as justice is directly opposed to injury, and as there are various ways in which a man may be injured, so there must be various branches of justice opposed to the different kinds of injury.

A man may be injured, *first*, in his person, by wounding, maiming, or killing him; *secondly*, in his family, by robbing him of his children, or any way injuring those he is bound to protect; *thirdly*, in his liberty, by confinement; *fourthly*, in his reputation; *fifthly*, in his goods or property; and, *lastly*, in the violation of contracts or engagements made with him. This enumeration, whether complete or not, is sufficient for the present purpose.

The different branches of justice, opposed to these different kinds of injury, are commonly expressed by the saying, that an innocent man has a right to the safety of his person and family, a right to his liberty and reputation, a right to his goods, and to fidelity to engagements made with him. To say that he has a right to these things, has precisely the same meaning as to say, that justice requires that he should be permitted to enjoy them, or that it is unjust to violate them. For injustice is the violation of right, and justice is, to yield to every man what is his right. (EAP V.v: 312–313)

In this passage, Reid offers an enumeration of those first-order principles of justice to which he takes the first principles of morals to apply. Were we to list the correlative requirements to the rights that Reid mentions, the list would be something like this:

We each have an obligation not to wound, maim, or kill others.

We each have an obligation not to abduct others' loved ones or those under their guardianship.

We each have an obligation not to confine others (over whom we do not have authority) against their will.

We each have an obligation not to destroy the reputation of others.

We each have an obligation to keep our promises and other commitments to others.

Call these the *principles of justice*.⁴ In various places, Reid makes it evident that, when applied to particular cases, these principles can conflict with other first-order principles: 'between particular external actions, which different virtues would lead to, there may be an opposition . . . it may happen, that an external

action which generosity or gratitude solicits, justice may forbid' (EAP V.i: 276). The best way to interpret the principles of justice, then, is to see them as expressing defensible or pro tanto moral obligations. Most importantly for our purposes, they are examples of the sorts of obligations to which most of the first principles of morals refer. It is the violation of these obligations for which an agent can be held accountable. It is these obligations about which we ought to be well-informed and keep before our mind's eye, and whose performance should be our 'most serious concern.'

Suppose, then, we distinguish *first-order moral principles* from the *first principles of morals*. When we do, we can better see the structure of Reid's thinking about moral obligation. Generally speaking, the latter are second-order moral principles that concern the former, enjoining us to bear various sorts of relations to them, such as keeping them before the mind's eye. But now puzzle: loom. For when Reid offers his reasons for believing that there are first principles of morals, he voices familiar-sounding foundationalist doctrines similar to those which he presents when stating the principles of common sense. Regarding morality, Reid writes:

Morals, like all other sciences, must have first principles, on which all moral reasoning is grounded.

In every branch of knowledge where disputes have been raised, it is useful to distinguish the first principles from the superstructure. They are the foundation on which the whole fabric of the science leans; and whatever is not supported by this foundation can have no stability.

In all rational belief, the thing believed is either itself a first principle, or it is by just reasoning deduced from first principles. When men differ about deductions of reasoning, the appeal must be made to the rules of reasoning, which have been very unanimously fixed from the days of ARISTOTLE. But when they differ about a first principle, the appeal is made to another tribunal: to that of common sense. (EAP V.i: 270; see also EAP III.iii.vi: 177)

Under a natural reading, this passage introduces chaos into Reid's thought. For one thing, in his discussion of moral judgment, Reid repeatedly stresses that the moral faculty yields not simply judgments about general moral principles but also particular judgments to the effect that 'this conduct is right, that is wrong; that this character has worth, that demerit' (EAP III.iii.vi: 176). But when one takes a closer look at Reid's account of particular moral judgments, it is clear that these judgments are by and large immediate or non-inferential; they are not the product of reasoning from general principles to particular cases. According to Reid, in 'the common occurrences of life, a man of integrity, who has exercised his moral faculty in judging what is right and wrong, sees his duty without reasoning, as he sees a highway. The cases that require reasoning are few' (EAP VII.ii: 553). And again: the person of integrity 'will rarely be at a loss to distinguish good from ill in his own conduct, without the labor of reasoning' (EAP V.ii: 280).

In fact, when Reid more fully develops his account of moral judgment, he draws explicit parallels with cases of perception in which agents are aware of

external signs and move without reasoning from the awareness of those signs to particular judgments. Regarding our judgments of the character traits of others, Reid writes:

Intelligence, design, and skill, are not objects of the external senses, nor can we be conscious of them in any person but ourselves....

A man's wisdom is known to us only by the signs of it in his conduct; his eloquence by the signs of it in his speech. In the same manner we judge of his virtue, of his fortitude, and of all his talents and qualities of mind.

Yet it is to be observed, that we judge of men's talents with as little doubt or hesitation as we judge of the immediate objects of sense.

... We perceive one man to be open, another cunning; one to be ignorant, another very knowing; one to be slow of understanding, another quick. Every man forms such judgments of those he converses with; and the common affairs of life depend upon such judgments. We can as little avoid them as we can avoid seeing what is before our eyes.

From this it appears, that it is no less part of the human constitution, to judge of men's characters, and of their intellectual powers, from the signs of them in their actions and discourse, than to judge of corporeal objects by our senses. (EIP VI.vii: 503–504)

The claim that the formation of particular moral judgments is ordinarily immediate or non-inferential, then, is not incidental to but lies deep in Reid's thinking. But it is manifestly incompatible with what he says about the role of the first principles of morals, under a natural reading. For, to say it again, particular moral judgments are generally not inferred from the first principles of morals. Moreover, even if these particular judgments were inferred or based on other moral judgments, they would typically be inferred from or based on not the first principles of morals but first-order moral principles, such as the principles of justice. Reid, it seems, has identified the wrong sorts of principles to belong to the structure of well-formed moral belief.⁵

Which brings me to a second point: I have claimed that most of the first principles of morals are such that they concern or are about first-order moral principles, such as the principles of justice. But if they bear this relation to the first-order moral principles, then the first-order principles cannot (in any non-trivial way) be deduced from them, as Reid claims. Take a sample of the first principles of morals, such as:

3g. What is done from unavoidable necessity may be agreeable or disagreeable, useful or hurtful, but cannot be the object either of blame or moral approbation.

4g. Men may be highly culpable in omitting what they ought to have done, as well as in doing what they ought not.

5g. We ought to use the best means we can to be well informed of our duty, by serious attention to moral instruction; by observing what we approve, and what we disapprove, in others and ourselves; by reflecting often on our own past conduct; by deliberating coolly and impartially upon our future conduct.

There is no way to derive any of the principles of justice from these propositions. They could not, then, function in a way similar to Kant's categorical imperative (Mill's principle of utility. For, under a standard interpretation, both the categorical imperative and the principle of utility play several distinct 'grounding' roles. In the first place, they are supposed to determine all our particular first-order moral obligations. According to Mill, for example, we have obligations not to harm others because acting in this way would maximize well-being on the whole. Second, were what Kant and Mill say true, the categorical imperative and the principle of utility would be the sorts of principles that could guide ethical deliberation and action. For by consulting them and engaging in some reasoning in which one appreciates their implications, one could in principle determine what one ought to do. And, third, if Kant and Mill are right, an agent's belief in either the categorical imperative or the principle of utility could epistemically justify her belief that she has some first-order obligation, as an agent can base her belief that she ought to act in some way on the further belief that it is implied by one of these principles.

Reid's first principles of morals, by contrast, do not and could not play any of these roles. Given Reid's description of them, in no interesting sense are the foundational.⁶

II. Realist constitutivism

The problems that afflict Reid's understanding of the first principles of morals are not, I believe, superficial. To make what he says about the first principles of morals cohere with other things he says, Reid would have to recast a good deal of his thought. Among other things, he would have to retract his claim that the first principles of morals ground or are the epistemic basis of other moral principles such as the principles of justice – at least in the sense he specifies in the passage quoted above (i.e., EAP V.i: 270).⁷ Rather than explore whether Reid's view could survive this alteration, I want in this section to head in a different direction further mining Reid's thought. Specifically, I want to ask whether the first principles of morals and first-order moral principles might play some other important role in moral thinking to which Reid is, perhaps indirectly, drawing our attention.⁸

To that end, let me bring Reid into conversation with contemporary ethical theorists by drawing a comparison between Reid's thought and recent work by Kantians such as Christine Korsgaard (Korsgaard 2008). In her recent work Korsgaard defends a position that I shall call *constitutivism*. The defining feature of constitutivism of the Kantian variety is that acting in accordance with normative principles of certain kinds is constitutive of practical agency. Specifically Korsgaard argues, there are two master principles – the hypothetical and the categorical imperatives – the conformance to which is constitutive of practical agency. The hypothetical imperative commands us to take the necessary means towards our ends; this corresponds to what Korsgaard calls the 'norm of efficacy

because it is only by taking the necessary means that we can successfully bring about our ends.⁹ The categorical imperative, by contrast, corresponds to what Korsgaard calls the 'norm of autonomy.' It governs the choice of actions by posing an admissibility test for acts being taken in pursuit of ends. Korsgaard makes additional claims about these principles that needn't concern us here. The important thing to see is that she holds that when agents fail to conform to these principles – as they often do – they do not thereby make practical mistakes. Rather, they fail to be practical agents. For example, failure to conform to the categorical imperative is, according to Kantian constitutivism, to fail to be a moral agent.

Korsgaard has her own reasons for defending a version of constitutivism. She maintains that moral principles would be authoritative, trumping any competing practical principles, only if they are immune to skeptical doubts. And for this to be the case, Korsgaard holds, 'our substantive principles must be derivable from formal ones,' such as the categorical imperative, the conformance to which is constitutive of practical agency (Korsgaard 2008, 2.1.7 and 46).

One will search in vain for any similar line of thought in Reid. Although Reid believes that moral principles are authoritative, he does not hold that in order for them to be authoritative they must be derivable from purely formal principles such as the categorical imperative or the Golden Rule. This difference notwithstanding, I want to suggest that there is a plausible interpretation of Reid according to which Reid is also a constitutivist, albeit of a decidedly non-Kantian variety. Under this reading, Reid holds that assenting to a range of substantive moral propositions is constitutive of competent moral thinking; failure to do so is not to make a moral mistake in which one accepts false substantive moral views but marks a failure to be a moral agent. If this reading were correct, Reid's view would represent an interesting type of position that is often overlooked in contemporary discussions in metaethics, as his view would be a version of *realist constitutivism*. The reason why this would represent an off-overlooked position is that constitutivism is almost always presented as a version of constructivist antirealism according to which the existence of moral principles depends on our practical activity. Korsgaard, for example, maintains that we 'create' these principles by engaging in practical activity. Reid's constitutivism, by contrast, is thoroughly realist in the sense that he rejects the claim that moral principles depend in any interesting sense on our practical reasoning.

Here is a pair of passages in which Reid's constitutivist commitments are evident:

It is a first principle of morals, that we ought not to do to another, what we should think wrong to be done to us in like circumstances. If a man is not capable of perceiving this in his cool moments, when he reflects seriously, he is not a moral agent, nor is he capable of being convinced of it by reasoning.

From what topic can you reason with such a man? You may possibly convince him by reasoning, that it is his interest to observe this rule; but this is not to convince him that it is his duty. To reason about justice with a man who sees nothing to be just or unjust, or about benevolence with a man who sees nothing in benevolence

preferable to malice, is like reasoning with a blind man about colour, or with a deaf man about sound. (EAP III.iii. vi: 177–178)

If any man could say with sincerity, that he is conscious of no obligation to consult his own present and future happiness; to be faithful to his engagements, to obey his Maker, to injure no man; I know not what reasoning, either probable or demonstrative, I could use to convince him of any moral duty. As you cannot reason in mathematics with a man who denies the axioms, as little can you reason with a man in morals who denies the first principles of morals. The man who does not, by the light of his own mind, perceive some things in conduct to be right, and others to be wrong, is as incapable of reasoning about morals, as a blind man is about colours. Such a man, if any such man ever was, would be no moral agent. (EIP VII.ii: 551–552)¹⁰

In these passages, Reid presents us with a pair of different scenarios that I might be helpful to more sharply distinguish. In the first scenario, Reid asks us to imagine a case in which we manage to persuade someone that it is in his interest to conform to principle 4p, which is Reid's version of the Golden Rule. Call this person *the egoist*. While Reid concedes that we might convince the egoist to conform to this principle by persuading him that it is in his self-interest to do so the egoist would nonetheless have a grasp of this principle that would be deeply defective, since he would see nothing that genuinely favors conforming to it beyond self-interest. The egoist fails to see that moral principles themselves favor acting in conformance to them.

In the second scenario, Reid asks us to envision a person whom we cannot persuade to accept moral principles, as he can 'see no obligation' whatsoever to act in certain ways, such as not harming others. Call this person *the amoralist*. The amoralist, Reid seems to suggest, would be like someone who fails to grasp moral concepts altogether, much like a blind person would fail to grasp color concepts.¹¹ In both cases, Reid suggests, the figures in question fail to be moral agents not simply in the sense that they would not be people with whom one could convince of certain ethical truths or engage in moral co-deliberation, but also in the sense of suffering from serious conceptual deficiencies. Under either scenario, these figures would either fail to grasp moral concepts, have a deeply confused grasp of them, or fail to see or acknowledge their manifest implications. (I hasten to add that this could be explained by any number of factors, such as having a moral sense that does not work well.) If we want a guiding metaphor for thinking about the role that moral principles play in these cases, they are not so much the *basis* for particular moral judgments so much as what set the *boundaries* of competent moral thought.

We can make progress with this interpretation of Reid by distinguishing two ways in which moral principles are constitutive of moral thought. Suppose, in the first place, that we mean by 'moral thought' the objects of moral thinking, namely, moral propositions. Moral principles are, in this first sense, constitutive of moral thought insofar as any reasonably comprehensive and consistent body of moral thoughts or propositions would have to include them. Suppose, by contrast, that we mean by 'moral thought' the activity of moral thinking.

Moral principles are, in this second sense, constitutive of moral thinking inasmuch as one could not competently engage in such thinking without affirming these principles.

Let's explore the first half of this distinction by introducing some terminology. Suppose we say that a *moral system* is a reasonably comprehensive and consistent body of moral propositions, which concerns beings like us in a world such as ours. Let's say, furthermore, that such a system is *minimally eccentric* just in case it does not incorporate eccentric empirical assumptions about us and the world. In Reid's terms, a minimally eccentric moral system would be one that is constrained by the principles of common sense, particularly those that he calls the 'first principles of contingent truths' – these truths specifying, among other things, that you are numerically identical with the person you were yesterday, that you are embodied, sentient, and have 'life and intelligence' (EIP VI.vi: 482). Now take any moral system that is minimally eccentric. Under the constitutivist interpretation, Reid's position is that, necessarily, any such system includes both the first principles of morals and certain first-order moral principles, such as the principles of justice. For ease of reference, call this constellation of propositions the *moral fixed points*.¹²

Nowhere, to my knowledge, does Reid present first-order moral principles as themselves self-evident or necessarily true. Still, in the central constitutivist passages just cited, it is telling that, when engaging with both the egoist and the amoralist, Reid himself refers to both the first principles of morals and the principles of justice. That he does, I take it, is good evidence that these propositions would be, in Reid's view, among the moral fixed points of any minimally eccentric moral system (at least for beings such as us). If so, any such system would include moral propositions such as:

- It is wrong to wound, maim, or kill others.
- It is wrong to abduct others' loved ones or those under their guardianship.
- It is wrong to confine others (over which one has no authority) against their will.
- It is wrong to destroy the reputation of others.
- It is wrong to break our promises and other commitments to others

—where, once again, the wrongness in question is pro tanto. Such a system would also include moral propositions that are first principles of morals such as:

- It is wrong to blame someone for doing something that is in no degree voluntary.
- It is wrong to fail to employ the best means we can to be well informed of our moral obligations.

And:

- It is wrong to treat others in such a way that we would judge to be wrong for him or her to act toward us, if we were in his or her circumstances and he or she in ours.

In calling a body of moral propositions that includes these principles a 'moral system,' I have been employing Reid's own terminology. In his chapter 'Of Systems of Morals,' Reid discusses various characteristics of moral systems, among which are the evidential role of the propositions that compose them:

a system of morals is not like a system of geometry, where the subsequent part derive their evidence from the preceding, and one chain of reasoning is carried on from the beginning; so that, if the arrangement is changed, the chain is broken, and the evidence is lost. It resembles more a system of botany, or mineralogy, where the subsequent parts depend not for their evidence upon the preceding, and the arrangement is made to facilitate apprehension and memory, and not to give evidence. (EAP V.ii: 281)

This passage presents a striking reversal of the foundationalist imagery Reid uses when he presents the first principles of morals, as Reid here denies that propositions that constitute a system of morals are like those that constitute a system of geometry in which some small set of foundational propositions supposed to evidentially support the others. When understood against passage, Reid's view begins to more closely resemble those defended by rational intuitionists, such as Ross. For these views maintain that there is no moral principle or small set of principles from which all other moral principles, such as the principles of justice, can be derived.¹³

I have been suggesting that, in Reid's view, there are definite limits at what could count as a moral system. For a moral system is necessarily constituted by an array of moral propositions – the moral fixed points – which include not only the first principles of morals but also various first-order moral principles, such as the principles of justice. The moral fixed points, in turn, necessarily true, at least concerning agents such as us in world such as ours. Given what Reid says about their role in moral thinking, moreover, the sort of necessity in question seems to be in the vicinity of conceptual necessity – what conceptually necessary truths would be those that are true in virtue of essences of their constituent concepts. Take, for example, the proposition (i) world such as ours) *that it is wrong to maim another human being*. If such proposition were true of conceptual necessity, then it would belong to essence of the concept 'being wrong' that (in a world such as ours) if any act taken with regard to a fellow human being falls under the concept 'being a concept of maiming another human,' then it must also fall under the concept 'being wrong.'¹⁴ The primary reason for thinking that the moral fixed points would have to be conceptually necessary truths is this: suppose, for argument's sake that such propositions were true but only of metaphysical necessity. Suppose, for example, that the truth necessarily, *it is wrong to maim another human being* were like the truth necessarily, *the atomic number of gold is 79*. If it were, then someone who denied it would make a mistake. But this mistake would provide no reason to hold that the agent who made it fails to be a moral agent, as Reid elsewhere indicates. If, however, the moral first principles were conceptually necessary, then we could make sense of Reid's claim that someone who considered but failed to assent to them would suffer from such a lack of understanding that she failed to be a moral agent.

Here, however, we must tread lightly. Those of us who work in the shadow of Frege are accustomed to distinguishing concepts, on the one hand, from

properties, on the other. Concepts, according to the broadly Fregean tradition are mind-independent, sharable, abstract ways of conceiving or thinking about objects or properties. Understood thus, they are not only abilities or devices for referring to objects and properties, since employing them allows us to refer to objects and properties, but also meanings, for they are the constituents of propositions. Reid was not, however, a proto-Fregean; he worked with no such distinction.¹⁵ Rather, he posits entities of one kind – namely, universals – to play the role of both concepts and properties. Universals, as Reid thinks of them, are predicables, entities that are both predicated of and belong to objects. In Reid's view, however, universals are also meanings and, thus, the constituents of propositions.¹⁶ This tendency of Reid's part to identify universals, meanings, and what he elsewhere calls conceptions is on display in the following passage:

To conceive the meaning of a general word, and to conceive that which it signifies, is the same thing. We conceive distinctly the meaning of general terms; therefore we conceive distinctly that which they signify. But such terms do not signify an individual, but what is common to many individuals; therefore we have a distinct conception of things common to many individuals, that is, we have distinct general conceptions.

We must here beware of the ambiguity of the word *conception*, which sometimes signifies the act of the mind in conceiving, sometimes the thing conceived, which is the object of that act. If the word be taken in the first sense, I acknowledge that every act of the mind is an individual act; the universality, therefore, is not in the act of the mind, but in the object, or thing conceived. The thing conceived is an attribute common to many subjects, or it is a genus or species common to many individuals. (EIP V.iii: 364; cf. EIP IV.i: 323, IV.ii: 311)¹⁷

Reid's tendency to not distinguish concepts from properties makes it much more difficult within his scheme to distinguish conceptually necessary truths from other sorts of necessary truths. But, to say it again, to vindicate the claim that a person who denies the moral fixed points suffers from something akin to a conceptual failure, it would appear that Reid needs to affirm the thesis that these truths hold of conceptual necessity (or something very much like it). Reid cannot, then, simply say that it belongs to the property *being wrong* that, necessarily, anything which is a case of maiming another is wrong. For its denial needn't imply a conceptual deficiency; there must be something about this property such that those who sincerely deny that cases of maiming are wrong (and do not hold eccentric empirical beliefs) suffer from the sort of deficiency in which we have excellent reason to doubt they are moral agents. However, short of making all necessary truths into conceptual ones – a position that Reid appears to reject – or introducing the idea that universals have modes of presentation, it is not evident whether Reid has available the resources to tell us what it might be.¹⁸

Be that as it may, let me now return to a distinction that I introduced a few paragraphs back. There I said that moral principles could be constitutive of moral thought in two senses. In one sense, moral principles are the objects of moral thought, as they are moral propositions; these principles are constitutive of

moral thought inasmuch as they are the fixed points of anything that could be denominated a moral system. In another sense, however, 'moral thought concerns not the objects of moral thinking but moral thinking itself. Along that way, we have had our eye on this sense of the phrase, too, noting that Reid appears committed to the thesis that, if a figure such as the egoist or the amoralist were to hold minimally eccentric beliefs about the world and also sincerely reject the moral fixed points, he would not thereby make a moral mistake drawing the wrong substantive moral conclusions about how to act. Rather, it would fail be a moral agent. He would not only be a person whom we could convince to accept moral propositions or with whom we could engage in genuine common moral deliberation, but also someone who does not engage in competent moral thinking. For in denying the moral fixed points, this person would suffer from a serious conceptual deficiency, being such as either to fail to grasp moral concepts, have a deeply confused grasp of them, or not see or acknowledge the manifest implications.

To claim that accepting certain substantive moral claims is constitutive competent moral thinking is controversial. Philosophers in the broad expressivist tradition have long resisted it (see Hare 1952). On this occasion my aim is not to defend this claim but to explore its implications. Suppose, for the sake of argument, it is true that accepting certain substantive moral claims constitutive of competent moral thinking. If it were, would Reid be committed to the thesis that denying the truth of the fixed points is a conceptual failure of such kind that it renders an agent's thinking about morality unintelligible?

Given other things that Reid says, I believe that the answer is No. For example, in his discussion of first principles in general, Reid raises the question, whether people 'who really love truth, and are open to conviction, may differ about first principles' (EIP VI.iv: 460). Reid's answer is that such a disagreement 'is possible, and that it cannot, without great want of charity, be denied to be possible' (ibid.). Admittedly, when one holds that something is a first principle and one's interlocutor does not, one 'must be convinced that there is a defect, or perversion of judgment on the one side or the other.' In the chapter 'Of Prejudices, the Causes of Error,' Reid elaborates at some length on what he takes to be the most common sources of error, identifying analogical reasoning, a love of simplicity, and the tendency to apply our cognitive faculties to matters which they are not fit to be applied among them (see EIP VIII). What is especially interesting given our purposes is that Reid seems alive to the possibility, in simply that a proposition may not in fact be a first principle but also that it may be confused or false (see Wolterstorff 2001, 97–98). In being alive to this possibility, Reid does not commit himself to the claim that, for any putative first principle, upon carefully reflecting on that principle, one can discern how it might be confused or false. It might be that, under favorable conditions, such principles would always seem necessarily true upon such reflection. The better way to interpret Reid is probably this: we are familiar with or can imagine cases of such kind in which something that seemed to be a first principle turned out to be

confused or false. Call such propositions *illusory*. Reid can agree that we cannot rule out that, given our evidence, the moral fixed points belong to the class of illusory propositions.

If this is right, the best way to understand Reid's view would be more nuanced than he himself states it in the central constitutivist passages cited earlier. Rather than say that a person, such as the amoralist, who denies that there are first principles of morals is similar to a blind person who had never seen colors, Reid could say that we have powerful pro tanto reason to believe that such a person suffers from a similarly serious conceptual deficiency. It is within the realm of imagination, however, that the amoralist has spotted confusions in our moral concepts that would render the moral fixed points confused or false. In that case, the principles might still seem to be true upon careful reflection but the seeming would be systematically misleading.

III. Realist constitutivism?

At various points in our discussion, I have described Reid's position as a version of realist constitutivism. I might have also described it as a version of *nonnaturalist* realist constitutivist, since Reid holds that moral truths are not part of the natural order (see Cuneo 2011). This type of position, I also suggested, is unusual, since nearly all versions of constitutivism are presented as versions of not realism but constructivist antirealism. That said, by calling Reid's position a version of realist constitutivism, I am in danger of offering a rather misleading picture of Reid's view. For Reid's metaethical commitments are, in an important respect, highly idiosyncratic. Let me close by explaining why.

Reid tells us that the constituents of moral principles are universals or predicables, writing:

If we examine the abstract notion of duty, or moral obligation, it appears to be neither any real quality of the action considered by itself, nor of the agent considered without respect to the action, but a certain relation between the one and the other . . . So that, if we seek the place of moral obligation among the categories, it belongs to the category of *relation*. (EAP III.iii.v: 173)

If Reid is right, these abstract relations are the constituents of what I have called the moral fixed points, these being necessary moral truths of a certain range. And yet when Reid describes what it is for something to be a property or relation, he repeatedly makes claims of the following sort:

Simple attributes, species and genera, lower or higher, are all things conceived, without regard to existence; they are universals, they are expressed by general words, and have an equal title to be called by the name of *ideas*. (EIP VI.iii: 442)

Ideas or universals, thus understood, are not things that exist, but things conceived, they neither have place nor time, nor are they liable to change.

When we say that they are in the mind, this can mean no more but that they are conceived by the mind, or that they are objects of thought. The act of conceiving

them is no doubt in the mind; the things conceived have no place, because they have no existence. (EIP VI.iii: 440; cf. EIP V.iii: 367; V.iv: 373, 375; V.vi: 393)

These passages can be interpreted in such a way that Reid is using the term 'exist' narrowly to include all and only those things that exist in space/time. But it is clear that Reid is not simply using the term 'exist' in this way. Reid, for example, holds that God exists, although God is presumably neither spatially nor temporally located. Moreover, elsewhere Reid acknowledges that, as he thinks of them, universals are what Plato called Ideas if we 'take away the attribute of existence, and suppose them not be things that exist, but things that are barely conceived' (EIP V.v: 386).¹⁹ It was, however, Plato's view that the Forms exist but are not temporally or spatially located. By denying that the Forms exist in the sense that Plato had in mind, which is a non-temporal/spatial sense, Reid seems to be denying that they exist simpliciter.

The resulting position is striking. On the one hand, we are told that there are necessary moral truths whose existence and nature does not depend on our being disposed to respond to non-moral reality in certain ways. On the other, we are told that the constituents of these truths do not exist; they are merely 'thinkables.' However striking this position may be, it is worth noting that it has contemporary analogues. In the section devoted to moral ontology in his recent *On What Matters*, Derek Parfit describes his own version of nonnaturalist 'Non-Metaphysical cognitivism' as committed to these two claims:

There are some claims that are, in the strongest sense, true, but these truths have no positive ontological implications.

When such claims assert that there are certain things, or that these things exist, these claims do not imply that these things exist in some ontological sense. (Parfit 2011, 479)

Parfit continues:

When we claim that there are some things that are merely possible, we must admit that, compared with things that are actual, such merely possible things have a lesser ontological status. That is why it matters, for example, whether good or bad possible events will also be actual and real. But when we consider certain abstract entities, such as prime numbers and logical truths, these distinctions do not apply. These numbers and truths are not less actual, or *real*, than stars, or human beings. These abstract entities have no ontological status. They are not in relevant senses, either actual or merely possible, or either real or unreal. When we are trying to form true beliefs about numbers or logical truths, we need not answer ontological questions. As one way to sum up these claims, we can say that, through there are these numbers and truths, these entities exist in a non-ontological sense. (Parfit 2011, 481)

Speaking now of normative features and truths, Parfit writes:

Like numbers and logical truths, these normative properties and truths have no ontological status. These properties and truths are not, in relevant senses, either actual or merely possible, or either real or unreal. In asking whether there are such normative truths, we need not answer ontological questions. There are, I believe, some such truths, which are as true as any truth could be. (Parfit 2011, 487)

I find these claims of Parfit's deeply puzzling mostly because it is difficult to see what Parfit means when he claims that there are things that exist 'in a non-ontological sense.' Puzzling or not, Parfit's views closely resemble Reid's position about the normative realm, as Reid also wants to speak of there being moral truths that fail to have any positive ontological implications in the sense that they are wholly composed of universals, which do not exist.²⁰

Reid's reputation in the history of philosophy is that of being a staunch defender of common sense. When one begins to dig deeper into his views, however, it becomes apparent that this reputation is only partially deserved. Reid sometimes defends positions that could hardly be called commonsensical. His views about the ontological status of moral truths, like his quasi-occasionalism about causality, are among them.²¹ Not only are his views about the ontological status of moral truths not commonsensical, they are also paradoxical. When discussing the modal status of moral truths, I briefly noted that Reid objects to response-dependent accounts of moral truths – which maintain that moral truths are determined by the operations of the moral sense – because these views fail to vindicate a sufficiently robust account of these truths. Defenders of the response-dependent view could, however, insist that Reid's objection does not come to much. They might rightly point out that their view, at least, is compatible with there being moral truths that exist in a very robust sense, having important positive ontological implications. Reid could not say the same about his position. For, in Reid's view, one would be speaking the literal truth when one says that moral truths do not exist.

Parfit, for his part, seems comfortable with the result that his metaethical views have no positive ontological implications and that there are antirealist views more ontologically committed than his. When pressed, I do not know whether Reid would be comfortable admitting the same. None of Reid's rivals, to my knowledge, challenged his metaethical views by drawing attention to this implication of his position.²²

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. In my formulation of these principles, I stay close to Reid's own wording but in some cases phrase them slightly differently from Reid or abbreviate them. I use subscripts

to distinguish the general from the particular principles. I do not know why Reid designates the first set of principles as general and the latter particular. The members of both sets of principles seem equally general.

2. An identity sentence states a truth only if both terms flanking '=' refer to the same thing. In the example I use, they both refer to Obama. Had Obama not existed however, they would not have so referred. So, the proposition is necessarily true or relative to Obama's actually existing. See Leflow (2012), 4.

3. The phrase comes from McNaughton (1996).

4. Reid offers a somewhat fuller list of the principles of justice in PE, 140.

5. There are two ways to address the concern raised above. First, one could deny that the first principles of morals are general principles. Van Cleave (1999) explores the 'particularist' reading with regard to the first principles of contingent truth Wolterstorff (2004), 92–95 addresses this interpretation, noting that it is difficult square with Reid's insistence that first principles are principles of common sense propositions that agents believe in common. Second, one could maintain that Reid also wishes to include among the first principles of morals what I have called the principles of justice. While I cannot rule out this possibility, it is worth noting that his presentation of the first principles, Reid does not include the principles of justice which is surprising if Reid thought of them as first principles in the sense specified the passage quoted above.

6. An exception might be principle 1P, which states (roughly) that we ought to prefer greater good to a lesser one. In his gloss of this principle, however, Reid specifies that by 'good' he means one's *good on the whole* (EAP V.1: 272). Strictly speaking, the this principle is one regarding prudential action: 'And though to act from this motive solely may be called *prudence* rather than *virtue*, yet this prudence deserves son regard upon its own account, and much more as it is the friend and ally of virtue, at the enemy of all vice....'

7. Patrick Rysiew has suggested to me that there is a third option, which is to reinterpret the sort of epistemic basing or grounding relation that Reid intends to employ. Under this re-interpretation, the grounding relation on which Reid has his eye would be the presuppositional variety – 'things we take for granted' (EIP I.ii) in the forming of various judgments and in whose absence of we could not form such judgment. While the details of this interpretation would have to be worked out, it strikes me as promising approach that is compatible with the reading of Reid that I offer in this section.

8. Those familiar with Rysiew (2002) and Wolterstorff (2001), Ch. IX will notice that the interpretation of Reid that I am about to develop regarding the first principles of morals has affinities with their proposals concerning how to understand the role of the principles of common sense.

9. As it is typically understood, the hypothetical imperative is disjunctive, enjoining one either to take the necessary means toward our ends or to surrender those ends. Korsgaard does not emphasize the second disjunct of this injunction. Perhaps this is because thus understood the hypothetical imperative is not clearly a norm of efficacy. Reid's constitutivism is not limited to the moral domain, as he sounds similar theme with regard to some non-moral matters. Regarding reasoning, for example, Reid writes: 'A man who perfectly understood a just syllogism, without believing that the conclusion follows from the premises, would be a greater monster than a man born without hands or feet' (EIP VI.v: 481).

10. Reid elsewhere indicates that the blind do not conceive colors and the deaf do not conceive sounds: 'Thus a man cannot conceive colours, if he never saw, nor sound if he never heard' (EIP IV.1: 308–309).

12. This terminology is borrowed from Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014), which offers a defense of moral nonnaturalism that appeals to the fixed points.
13. Reid is careful to note that a system of morals is not to be equated with a *theory* of morals. For the latter, Reid writes, is simply 'a just account of the structure of our moral powers' (EAP VII.ii: 282). Thus understood, a theory of morals, Reid points out, has 'little connection with the knowledge of our duty; and those who differ most in the theory of our moral powers, agree in the practical rules of morals which they dictate' (ibid).
14. Cuneo and Shafer-Landau (2014) work out the details of this approach, distinguishing different types of conceptual necessity. Fundamental to the approach is the claim that conceptual truths needn't be empty of content or obviously true.
15. Reid, as I will note in a moment, does say that we have *conceptions*. What Reid means by a 'conception' is, however, a vexed issue. But it is clear that he does not have anything like Fregean concepts in mind. As Castagnetto (1992) points out, Reid seemed to think that when it comes to the nature of thinking, we have two options: either its immediate objects are Lockean ideas or worldly objects themselves. Reid opts for the latter.
16. 'In every other proposition,' Reid writes, 'the predicate at least must be a general notion; a predicable and an universal being one and the same' (EIP VI.i: 415; cf. EIP IV.i: 302 and VI.iii: 439).
17. Might Reid be using the term 'meanings' simply to talk of referents? Other passages suggest that he is not. Concerning the meaning of general terms, Reid writes: 'That such general words may answer their intention, all that is necessary is, that those who use them should affix the same meaning or notion, that is, the same conception to them. The common meaning is the standard by which such conceptions are formed, and they are said to be true or false, according as they agree or disagree with it. Thus, my conception of felony is true and just, when it agrees with the meaning of that word in the laws relating to it, and in authors who understand the law. The meaning of the word is the thing conceived; and that meaning is the conception affixed to it by those who best understand the language.' (EIP IV.i: 303) While this passage raises questions about Reid's views, it strikes me as good – albeit not decisive – evidence that meanings are not, for Reid, merely referents. Cf. EIP 408. For a different view, see Rysiew (forthcoming).
18. See, for example, what Reid says about real essences at EIP V.ii. One might propose, on Reid's behalf, that these moral principles are not conceptual truths but metaphysically necessary truths that are self-evident. This proposal would not, I believe, dissolve the puzzle facing Reid's view. Reid's understanding of self-evidence is, after all, the traditional one: self-evident propositions are 'no sooner understood than they are believed. The judgment follows the apprehension of them necessarily' (EIP VI.ii: 452). It might be that, according to this understanding of self-evidence, those who deny self-evident moral propositions are not competent moral agents. But now suppose that propositions are constituted by universals, as Reid believes. We still need to know what is it about those universals that constitute the self-evident moral propositions which guarantees that when someone considers and fails to believe these propositions, he thereby fails to engage in competent moral thought in the sense that Reid specifies.
19. 'The nature of every species, whether of substance, of quality, or of relation, and in general every thing which the ancients called an universal, answers to the description of a Platonic idea, if in that description you leave out the attribute of existence' (EIP IV.ii 319).
20. Reid does not always state his position so starkly. Elsewhere he writes: 'Ideas are said to have a real existence in the mind, at least, while we think of them; but universals have no real existence. When we ascribe existence to them, it is not an existence in time or place,

but existence in some individual subject; and this existence means no more that they are truly attributes of such a subject. Their existence is nothing but predicability or the capacity of being attributed to a subject. The name of predicables, which was given them in ancient philosophy, is that which most properly expresses their nature' (EIP V.ii: 395). In this passage, Reid's view sounds even closer to Parfit's, as Reid is willing to talk of more or less robust ways in which a thing exists. In EIP IV: 373, Reid claims that only individuals exist. Universals, since they are not individuals, do not exist. This thesis would allow Reid to claim that God exists even though God is not temporally or spatially located. To my knowledge, Reid never offers an argument for thinking the only individuals exist, simply following Locke and Berkeley on this issue.

21. Tuguey (2000) explores Reid's quasi-occasionalism.
22. Thanks to Rebecca Copenhaver, Patrick Rysiew, and René van Woudenberg for their feedback on an earlier draft of this essay, as well as to the participants at the New Essays on Reid Conference at the University of Vermont in November 2013.

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CHAPTER 10

REASON AND THE PASSIONS

TERENCE CUNEO

The great moral philosophers of early modernity come to us pre-packaged. Rather often we're told that philosophers such as Clarke, Price, and Reid are rationalists, while thinkers such as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume are sentimentalists.¹ The distinction between these two schools, we're further told, consists in this: for the rationalists, reason is the basis of morality. According to the rationalists, morality is (in some sense) both grounded in and grasped by reason. For the sentimentalists, by contrast, affect is the ground of morality. According to the sentimentalists, morality has little to do with reason, as it is (in some sense) both grounded in and discerned by sentiment.

It is natural to be suspicious of categorizations such as these; they tend to lack nuance, blocking from view what particular thinkers who allegedly belong to one or another school actually say. The categorization before us is no exception. After all, a close reading of the relevant texts reveals that sometimes those pegged as rationalists emphasize the role of affect more than we would imagine (as in the case of Reid), while those categorized as sentimentalists have more robust conceptions of reason than sometimes advertised (as with Shaftesbury).

But if the rationalist/sentimentalist distinction threatens to obfuscate certain issues, it also promises to illuminate others. For one thing, it allows us to see that, for the philosophers of early modernity, reason and passion are two of the most fundamental categories in which they did their thinking about morality. More precisely, they are two of the most fundamental categories in which they did their thinking about *metaethical* issues, such as those that concern the nature of moral truth and judgment. Moreover, the distinction helps us to see what problems these philosophers were worried about. In the rationalists, for example, one senses a great deal of anxiety about whether certain trends in moral philosophy, such as the rise of ethical egoism, would destroy virtue because they challenged the objectivity of morality. The rationalists saw no way to meet this challenge apart from arguing that morality has its source in reason; to deviate from morality,

according to the rationalists, is to be irrational. Like the rationalists, the sentimentalists were also concerned about the corrosive effects of the so-called selfish-school. For the sentimentalists, however, the primary challenge was not to vindicate the objectivity of morality but to explain how we could arrive at "moral distinctions" that were capable of gripping us and moving us to genuinely virtuous action. And they believed that reason was of no help in this regard; only sentiment could do the job.

When employed with care, then, the rationalist/sentimentalist distinction can help us to discern both the shape and fundamental concerns of early modern moral philosophy, especially among the so-called British moralists. My aim in this chapter is to offer a snapshot of the debate between the sentimentalists and rationalists by exploring the thought of two towering figures of the Scottish Enlightenment: Francis Hutcheson and Thomas Reid. Hutcheson and Reid are not often read side-by-side. But I think that doing so will bring their views into sharper relief, and will allow us to gain a better perspective on Hume's distinctive contribution to eighteenth-century British moral philosophy.

The snapshot of the British moralists I shall offer, then, is somewhat unusual inasmuch as it engages two relatively neglected figures who are rarely brought into conversation. It is, however, atypical in another respect. Recent work on the British moralists has tended to read the history of moral philosophy as one in which its main figures were inexorably moving toward a naturalistic, secularized view of the moral domain, finding its culmination in Kant's ethics.² In this literature, Reid is typically ignored while Hutcheson is read as a proto-naturalist. I propose, by contrast, to approach our topic differently. I intend to give Reid a fair hearing and wish to take the religious context in which both Hutcheson and Reid worked with full seriousness, reading Hutcheson as a theist who has important things to say about the relation between God and morality. When we do so, an interpretation of Hutcheson emerges that is considerably different from that offered by recent commentators. Indeed, one of my suggestions shall be that Reid himself failed to appreciate the importance of the theistic dimensions of Hutcheson's thought.

10.1 HUTCHESON

Hutcheson devoted nearly all his energies as a moral philosopher to developing a two-front polemic—the first being one in which he engages ethical egoists such as Hobbes, Pufendorf, and Mandeville, the second being one in which he attacks rationalists such as Clarke, Cudworth, and Wollaston. We can do no better, I think, than to enter Hutcheson's thought by having the main elements of these two lines of attack before us, beginning with the attack on egoism.