

COMMON SENSE AND PRAGMATISM: REID AND PEIRCE ON THE
JUSTIFICATION OF FIRST PRINCIPLES

NATE JACKSON
Baylor University

ABSTRACT

This paper elucidates the pragmatist elements of Thomas Reid's approach to the justification of first principles by reference to Charles S. Peirce. Peirce argues that first principles are justified by their surviving a process of 'self-criticism', in which we come to appreciate that we cannot bring ourselves to doubt these principles, in addition to the foundational role they play in inquiries. The evidence Reid allows first principles bears resemblance to surviving the process of self-criticism. I then argue that this evidence allows Reid and Peirce a way out of the dilemma between dogmatism and skepticism regarding the justification of such principles, insofar as they are epistemically, and not solely practically, justified.

Key Terms: Charles S. Peirce, Thomas Reid, pragmatism, epistemic justification, first principles, common sense, criticism

The historical connections between Thomas Reid and American pragmatism have not garnered much attention, though there is a growing literature on the pragmatic elements of Reid's epistemology. This neglect is surprising because early pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce was a great admirer of Reid. Peirce even refers to Reid as 'that subtle and well-balanced intellect', and calls his own approach 'critical common-sensism', suggesting at least a nominal connection to Reid (Peirce [1905] 1958: 208, 204). Moreover, as we shall see, the connections between Reid and the pragmatist tradition are more than nominal, and appreciation of Peirce's approach to first principles elucidates Reid's pragmatist commitments.

Those philosophers who have attempted to elucidate the connections between Thomas Reid and pragmatism have focused on Reid's epistemology, particularly

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his defense of the rationality of believing the principles of common sense. Peter Baumann suggests that there is a problem regarding the justificatory status of Reid's first principles. Baumann argues that acceptance of the principles of common sense faces a dilemma between dogmatism and skepticism. Baumann continues, however, that Reid offers hints of a pragmatic way out of the dilemma, but this pragmatic way out abandons claims to epistemic justification regarding acceptance of the first principles. I argue that the principles of common sense are epistemically justified on Reid's account, and this account incorporates pragmatist elements. Supporting this claim requires identifying and connecting pragmatist accounts of epistemic justification, particularly justification of first principles, and Reid's account. My project, then, is twofold. The first task is to elucidate Reid's pragmatist commitments in a manner that does not misrepresent Reid's thoughts or American pragmatism. The second task is to show that these connections provide a response to Baumann's dilemma.

Attempts to draw connections between Reid and pragmatism have taken two general approaches. The first is to show that Reid cannot or does not offer an epistemic defense of the principles of common sense, and instead offers (or at least hints at) a pragmatic argument. Peter Baumann and P.D. Magnus endorse this approach, though they differ on the nature of the pragmatic justification. The second approach is to identify some characteristic features of common sense and American pragmatism, and to elucidate the connections found there. Erik Lundestad and Patrick Rysiew each take this approach. While my main concern is to suggest and defend the thesis that Reid's justification of the principles of common sense incorporates pragmatist commitments, I suggest that the first approach suffers marked drawbacks.

In order to see the substantive connections between Reid and the American pragmatists, I take a version of the second approach, and look to figures within the pragmatist tradition to identify their philosophical commitments. With this end in view, I explicate Reid's defense of first principles, and a pragmatist justification of first principles by reference to Charles S. Peirce. In this analysis, we see that as Reid's account of the self-evidence of principles involves with Peirce a commitment to self-criticism, a brand of responsible inquiry, which offers rational support regarding first principles. Finally, I contend that the pragmatist elements of Reid's account of the justification of the principles of common sense enables a way out of the dilemma between dogmatism and skepticism regarding the justification of such principles, insofar as they are epistemically, and not solely practically, justified.

A WORD ON THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF CONTINGENT TRUTH

What is at issue is the epistemic justification of the principles of common sense, or the first principles of contingent truth. These principles are foundational to our

ability to reason. Reid writes, 'I hold it to be certain, and even demonstrable, That all knowledge got by reasoning must be built upon first principles' (*IP*: 454). Further, first principles themselves are not supported by a chain of reasoning, rather, they are 'self-evident' (*IP*: 452).

Concerning these principles, Reid writes,

If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd (*IHM*: 33).

Believing the principles, then, is required for other reasoning practices, and the foundational beliefs themselves are products of our constitution (assuming we are functioning properly).

Elsewhere, Reid identifies two general types of propositions about which we have knowledge, necessary and contingent truths. Here, Reid identifies the first principles of contingent truth. Among the first principles enumerated are:

- 'I hold... the existence of every thing of which I am conscious'
- '... the thoughts of which I am conscious, are the thoughts of a being which I call *myself*, my *mind*, my *person*'
- '... those things did really happen which I distinctly remember'
- and
- 'the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious' (*IP*: 470, 472, 474, 480).

Reid maintains that the first principles of contingent truth or principles of common sense are the foundation of reasoning, though these principles cannot be justified by reference to other, more fundamental propositions. Rather, the first principles of common sense are self-evident; they are, 'no sooner understood than they are believed. The judgment follows the apprehension of them necessarily, and both are equally the work of nature, and the result of our original powers' (*IP*: 452). But, if we cannot give a reason for them, then it seems that difficulties loom for justifying the first principles. As we shall see below, Peter Baumann articulates the difficulty as a dilemma.

THE FIRST APPROACH: BAUMANN AND MAGNUS

Peter Baumann argues that Reid's defense of common sense principles faces an implicit dilemma. If Reid wants to make truth and knowledge claims about the principles of common sense as 'first truths', the skeptic can press for justification.

However, Baumann argues that the common sense philosopher will not meet the skeptical demand, insisting that common sense philosophy maintains that, 'we cannot argue for the principles of common sense' (Baumann 1999: 51). If the common sense philosopher makes truth-claims about the principles of common sense without argument for their justification, she embraces dogmatism, the first horn of the dilemma. The second horn, should the common sense philosopher abandon truth or knowledge claims about the principles of common sense, is skepticism (Baumann 1999: 51).

Baumann suggests that Reid has the materials for a third way out of the dilemma: a pragmatic response. Baumann's proposal consists of two parts. First, the common sense philosopher holds, 'The search for a theoretical justification of the principles of common sense does not even make sense' (Baumann 1999: 53). Second, the principles are justified insofar as they 'enable us to build theories which guide our actions and let us attain our goals' (Baumann 1999: 53). By *theoretical justification*, we are to understand epistemic justification to be distinct from pragmatic justification, as Baumann calls the latter reasons, 'a totally different kind of justification' (Baumann 1999: 53). Pragmatic reasons and epistemic reasons are entirely separate on this account.

But this justification will surely cut no ice with the skeptic, who can ask: On what grounds should we think that these principles allow us to reach our goals? The skeptic can raise her challenge to the belief that common sense deliverances are useful (Magnus 2004: 69–72). Baumann later develops this pragmatic maneuver, giving a decision-theoretic argument (Baumann 2004: 73–77). We can measure the outcomes of two different strategies against one another on both epistemic and practical dimensions. The two strategies are: (1) acceptance of common sense principles, and (2) external world skepticism. If there is no external world, the practical outcome of either strategy is the same. If there is an external world, then we can consider 'possible accidents like breaking one's nose or falling into a hole', and on such considerations, the common sense strategy dominates insofar as we want to avoid injury (Baumann 2004: 74). Considering epistemic outcomes of the two strategies in the possible circumstances, neither strategy dominates the other since common sense will be true if there is an external world, but false if there is not, and skepticism will be true if there is no external world, but not if there is. So, within epistemic parameters (assuming an equal likelihood of either situation obtaining), there is no reason to prefer the common sense strategy, but there is on practical parameters.

This response faces difficulties as well. For instance, Baumann himself maintains that the pragmatic responses given are not the justification for principles of common sense that Reid actually gave, nor does Baumann endorse even his initial practical response (Baumann 1999: 53–54). Moreover, P.D. Magnus offers a compelling criticism of the later decision-theoretic gambit. How would we know what the outcome of either strategy would be if there is not external world? It seems

that in this case, we could say nothing about the outcomes, and we would need to be able to do so in order to identify the dominant strategy (Magnus 2008: 6).

Against Baumann, Magnus argues that the pragmatic element of Reid's defense of the principles of common sense consists in the argument from practical commitment, rather than either of Baumann's suggestions. The principles of common sense 'must be right if our everyday lives are to make any sense, but he [Reid] cannot give an unconditional defense of our everyday lives' (Magnus 2004: 4). Supposedly, the skeptic understands that some practices imply external world beliefs. If the skeptic engages in those practices (like not stepping in kennels), then they accept common sense beliefs. In response, however, it seems that the skeptic is happy to acknowledge the irresistibility of certain practices and beliefs.¹ What Magnus provides is a rejection of the skeptic's challenge, not a pragmatic response to the demand for justification.

Both Baumann and Magnus face serious difficulties with their 'pragmatic' justifications. First, the various pragmatic justifications they offer do not adequately answer skeptical challenges. Second, both maintain that Reid is committed to there being no reasoning regarding first principles, a commitment I do not see Reid making. Finally, neither author has given the reader a reason to accept that there is any substantial philosophical connection between Reid and American pragmatism, as neither has developed a picture of what a pragmatist commitment should look like. Thus, their responses fail the first task of adequately responding to the dilemma, and the exegetical task of drawing connections between Reid and the American pragmatists. Regarding pragmatist commitments on reasons for belief, both Baumann and Magnus distinguish *pragmatic* from *epistemic* justification of principles in a manner that is not characteristic of pragmatism or, as we shall see, Thomas Reid. Instead, by looking to Reid's defense of first principles and Peirce's defense of critical common-sensism, we can see pragmatist elements within each figure's account of the epistemic justification of first principles. This suggestion is more akin to the second approach.

THE SECOND APPROACH

The authors who have taken this second approach are Erik Lundestad and Patrick Rysiew. Both identify characteristic features of American pragmatism, though they differ on Reid's relationship to the tradition, and even on whether Reid offers *any* justification for first principles. Erik Lundestad argues that common sense just *is* the dogmatic horn of the dilemma, and one needs a 'pragmatic shift' in order to escape (Lundestad 2006: 125–137; 2008: 175–187). And, Patrick Rysiew significantly improves the elucidation of Reid's pragmatist commitments.

Erik Lundestad argues that common sense philosophy attempts to show 'that our belief in the senses must be taken for granted *even if*, as the skeptic has

rightfully pointed out, it is *not* justified' (Lundestad 2008: 176). Common sense deliverances are not justifiably believed. This, 'leaves us in a stalemate', where the skeptic can claim that Reid missed the point, namely that though that skeptic cannot *really* doubt common sense, we are still unable to justify our common sense beliefs (Lundestad 2006: 132). In order to avoid the horns of common sense and of skepticism, Lundestad argues, one must link knowledge to action, a move Reid does not make. By understanding knowledge as linked to activity and practical engagement, supposedly pragmatism can avoid the dilemma, as a belief's practically corroborating with, and 'working' in, experience affords justification.

Patrick Rysiew comments on Lundestad's argument, that, 'it is just not clear that Reid *does* think that certain common sense beliefs, especially, the first principle, "are not justified"' (Rysiew 2014: 9). But while Lundestad's interpretation of Reid may be wanting, his approach to the sort of justification we are after is a significant improvement on the Baumann-Magnus line. Baumann and Magnus distinguish sharply between practical reasons and epistemic reasons, and argue that while no epistemic reasons can be offered to justify first principles, practical ones can be offered. Lundestad's analysis highlights important aspects of American pragmatism; epistemic justification as tied to practices, inquiry and rational control as called for only in the face of real doubt, and corroboration and working in experience as affording support for our practices.

Rysiew suggests, 'the emphasis on practice comprises a *central part* of that attempt [to justify first principles]' (Rysiew forthcoming: 2). He develops this suggestion by citing Hilary Putnam's four characteristically pragmatist theses: (1) the rejection of skepticism and the affirmation that doubt requires justification; (2) the willingness to embrace fallibilism; (3) the rejection of sharp dichotomies such as those between fact and value, thought and experience, mind and body, analytic and synthetic etc; and what he calls (4) 'the primacy of practice'. Rysiew examines Reidian notions of first principles, evidence, and common sense to show that Reid affirms, to some degree, the four pragmatist theses.

This method seems more promising. First, it ensures that the pragmatism to which Reid is linked is not merely practical expediency in the guise of American pragmatism. Moreover, regarding first principles Rysiew argues Reid's justification of them consists in the contingent fact that

there *could not be* any reasonable (evidence-based) doubt as to the truth of the first principles. So, since it is rational to act on and believe that to which there is not – never mind, could not be – any reasonable alternative, it is rational for us to hold to the first principles of common sense (Rysiew forthcoming: 16).

As we shall see, this appeal to real, evidence-based doubt is characteristic of the pragmatist idea of self-criticism. Like Rysiew, I think Reid has pragmatic commitments in his justification of first principles. I stress that pragmatic accounts

of epistemic justification are accounts of responsible inquiry, where inquiry is limited by problems arising in practice, and the nature of the question into which one is inquiring. I see my work in what follows as a development on Rysiew's analysis, (1) clarifying what commitments pragmatists have regarding epistemic justification, (2) showing that these commitments provide a means out of the dilemma between dogmatism and skepticism.

PRAGMATISM, PEIRCE AND FIRST PRINCIPLES

Part of the difficulty in trying to elucidate substantive connections between Reid and pragmatism is, as Rysiew puts it, 'pragmatism resists any very pithy reduction' (Rysiew forthcoming: 11). Since Charles S. Peirce first formulated the pragmatist maxim, a number of philosophers have offered different conceptions of the school. Some of these authors disavow pragmatism's concern for epistemology altogether.² But these rejections belie fundamental concerns of American pragmatism.

By looking to what foundational figures in the tradition have to say regarding epistemic justification of believing first principles, we can focus the question on what pragmatic elements there are in Reid's defense of the principles of common sense. If connections can be made to foundational figures, then these connections should make possible tracing similar commitments through the rest of the tradition. The tradition may resist reduction, but it unarguably stems from and builds upon the work of Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. More recent pragmatists, such as the neo-pragmatists Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty, and the new pragmatists like Cheryl Misak, differ in several respects, but most prominently in which of the classical pragmatists (Peirce, James, and Dewey) tradition they fall (Pihlström 2004: 47–48). Thus, one limitation of picking a founding father of pragmatism to pinpoint pragmatic theses is that not all contemporary authors will agree on which figure ought to be emphasized.

With this limitation in mind, I think we can still get valuable insight by analyzing early figures. Further, though his work might be less well-known than other early pragmatists, I suggest fixing upon the work of Charles S. Peirce to find distinctively pragmatist commitments regarding epistemic justification. I focus on Peirce for three reasons. First, as noted at the outset, Peirce's admiration for Reid is explicit in his authorship. Second, Peirce's treatment of epistemic justification directly addresses justification of principles, simplifying the interpretive task, and the philosophical task of responding to the dilemma. Finally, Peirce is the founder of pragmatism, and subsequent figures can be read as in some way developing his thought. If a connection can be made to Peirce, then we have some reason to think that more or less strong connection can be made between Reid and other figures in the tradition.

In general, pragmatic accounts of epistemic justification are accounts of responsible, or controlled, inquiry. The normative status of a belief as rationally accepted is determined by the nature of the practices and methods of problem-solving *activity* out of which the belief is formed. Inquiry only arises when problems arise in practice, and these problems are constituted by the agitation of doubt. Responsible inquiry is a matter of fixing belief through an experimental method; 'A knower is an agent, who obtains empirical support for her beliefs by making experimental interventions in her surroundings and learning from the experiences that her actions elicit' (Hookway 2010). Inquiry arises out of problematic situations, solutions are inquired into in practice, and the outcome of successful inquiry is a rational belief free from the agitation of doubt. Peirce goes so far as to define truth in terms of inquiry, writing, 'The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth' (Peirce [1878] 1958: 133).

Peirce calls his view critical common-sensism, affirming that there are some beliefs and inferences that are not justified by inquiry, but play a fixed role in inquiry regarding other beliefs. How do we uphold these beliefs as justified which are in principle dubitable, but as they are not *in fact* doubted, inquiry is not begun nor finally settled? Peirce maintains that 'the propositions and inferences which Critical Common-sensism holds to be original, in the sense that one cannot "go behind" them (as the lawyers say), are indubitable in the sense of being acritical' (Peirce [1905] 1958: 204). He goes on to limit the term *reasoning* to mean accepting one belief on the basis of another and some self-controlled, conscious, process. As original principles and inferences are not subject to rational self-control in inquiry, one cannot justify them by responsible inquiry.

However, this does not mean that Peirce thinks there is no method for establishing a belief as *original*, or for obtaining rational support for that belief. In effect, what Peirce recommends is a process of trying to get oneself to doubt the principle-candidate. Inquiry does not require principles that are free from the possibility of doubt, instead 'inquiry ... has only to start from propositions free from all actual doubt. If the premises are not doubted at all, they cannot be more satisfactory than they are' (Peirce [1877] 1958: 101). Finally, Peirce notes that in the absence of actual doubt, inquiry lacks purpose, except for 'self-criticism' (Peirce [1877] 1958: 101).

But how do we go about this process, considering we are not in a state of real doubt regarding original beliefs and inferences? Christopher Hookway offers helpful analysis on this question; he writes,

The process of criticism is an attempt to force ourselves into just that position; if criticism succeeds, then doubt or agnosticism [concerning common sense] would be appropriate... When we terminate this process of criticism, then we

have a new piece of information: it has proved impossible to doubt (Hookway 2003: 217).

This impossibility is not quite the result of inquiry; inquiry requires doubt to get off the ground. However, this process of criticism justifies the belief, insofar as it is not a belief that is subject to possible inquiry, at least as things stand now.³

Peirce's response to our failure to bring about doubting is not to regard the failure as a reason to *accept* the common sense belief in question. 'Acceptance' is a term reserved for the psychological settled state that is the result of inquiry, after the experience of the irritation of doubt. The attempt, and failure, to bring about the condition of doubt supports persisting in the belief in, say, the external world is not the acceptance of a new belief, but the persistence in this belief receives rational support (Hookway 2003: 217). None of this precludes the future possibility of doubt, but it does give us rational support for continuing to trust 'our instinctive beliefs and habits' (Hookway 2003: 222). Moreover, these beliefs are not supported by more fundamental propositions, but by seeing that we cannot bring ourselves to doubt them.

If we do manage to bring ourselves to doubt them, given their role in inquiry regarding other beliefs, we have blocked future inquiry and pursuit of other reasonable beliefs. Essentially, we rid ourselves of our ability to perform inquiry, giving up epistemic agency, and the possibility of having other, non-foundational, justified beliefs.⁴ As the fixed points of inquiry are required for inquiry, and it is by being inquirers that we can ascribe reasonableness to individuals, we cannot reject all of the principles through doubt.

From Peirce, we see that a pragmatist understands the epistemic status of a belief in terms of inquiry. Inquiry requires some principles that are, during inquiry, fixed, in order to fix other beliefs. Principles, then, do not receive rational support in the same manner as those beliefs that are (or can be) settled through inquiry. These principles can be rationally justified through a process called *self-criticism*, a method of fixing belief in principles for which problems do not arise in practice. This process is a matter of attempting to bring about the real doubt, the psychological irritation of doubt regarding the principles. The inability to doubt the principles does not ensure their truth. However, given that we cannot put ourselves in a position to doubt them and we require them in our other inquiries (that is, we require them to pursue believing reasonably), we are justified in believing these principles. The justification of our belief in the 'fixed points' of inquiry, those points that cannot be psychologically doubted, is a matter of seeing that these points are not open to doubt. With these commitments in view, I turn to explicating Reid's defense of first principles. We shall see, Reid's defense involves an appeal to the psychological irritation of doubt, our epistemic agency, and the role principles play in those practices that warrant calling someone reasonable.

REID ON FIRST PRINCIPLES

As noted above, Reid identifies principles of common sense as ‘principles... which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them’ (*IHM*: 33). But what justifies acceptance of the first principles common sense? First, Reid claims that first principles ‘require to be handled in a way peculiar to themselves. Their evidence is not demonstrative, but intuitive. They require not proof, but to be *placed in the proper point of view*’ (*IP*: 41). As we shall see, placing them in this point of view closely resembles Peirce’s account of rational support through self-criticism.

In spite of the claims that common sense is not answerable to reason, we are not bereft of any way of justifying first principles. The interpretations that claim we cannot reason or justify first principles seem to confuse demonstrative reasoning (reasoning from premises to a conclusion) with all reasoning. Just as Peirce suggests that first principles can be rational though they cannot be subject to inquiry, Reid affirms that there is a defense of the rationality of accepting the first principles. This defense will be unique to first principles, as self-criticism is, ‘they require to be handled in a way peculiar to themselves’ (*IP*: 41). Reid writes of first principles that they ‘are no sooner understood than they are believed ... [the proposition] has the light of truth in itself, and has no occasion to borrow it from another’ (*IP*: 41). Such propositions are self-evident. Reid affirms, ‘although it is contrary to the nature of first principles to admit of direct or *apodictical* proof, yet there are certain ways of reasoning even about them, by which those that are just and solid may be confirmed, and those that are false may be detected’ (*IP*, 463). But, given the lack of more foundational beliefs for our reasoning practices, how can we reason about them?

Rysiew reconstructs Reid’s argument for the *reasonableness* of accepting first principles as follows. We are faced with three options; we can doubt all of the first principles, some of them, or none of them. Doubting all of them is both psychologically impossible, and unreasonable because doubting all of the first principles would preclude any reasonable basis for doubt. Doubting some of them is arbitrary, since the belief-forming faculties of reason and experience are ‘equally a part of our constitution’ (Rysiew 2001: 445). Thus, we are left with trusting all of them as the reasonable alternative (Rysiew 2001: 445–446).

We cannot, constituted as we are, in practice doubt the first principles without taking on a vastly different epistemic character; ‘for first principles, no other reason can be given but this, that, by the constitution of our nature, we are under a necessity of assenting to them;’ if we manage to get ourselves to not assent to them, we take on the perspective of a fool or a madman (*IHM*: 71). When Reid claims that the first principles are *self-evident*, he is claiming that the first principles are such that, given our nature as epistemic subjects and the epistemic

practices we find ourselves necessarily engaged in, we do not actually experience doubt regarding the first principles.

Recall the distinction Peirce makes between inquiry and self-criticism, or rational acceptance and rational persistence. The process of self-criticism allows us to rationally maintain a belief when that belief is not, in practice, possibly subject to inquiry. For Reid, getting the first principles in the proper perspective resembles the Peircean process of self-criticism. We see, that, once understood, the first principles are justifiably held because they are un-criticize-able (not open to doubt) so long as we are capable of being reasonable.⁵

One *prima facie* difference between Reid and Peirce on first principles is that Reid claims that the principles are self-evident, rather than claiming that they survive an attempt to bring about doubt regarding them. The claim that the first principles of contingent truth are self-evident may seem to resist pragmatic parallels, as self-evidence carries with it the notion of evidence. If Reid affirms that for any doxastic attitude, that attitude is justified on the basis of the evidence one has, and self-evidence is a variety of evidence, then it seems that Reid does not affirm a pragmatic view of justification for the first principles. However, I think the Reidian notion of self-evidence involves pragmatist elements, specifically the centrality of the distinction between live doubt and merely possible falsehood central to self-criticism.

Evidence, Reid claims, is ‘whatever is a ground of belief’ (*IP*: 228). He distinguishes between various sorts of evidence, and maintains that the differing types are not reducible to one common type, they are all ‘fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind’ (*IP*: 231). Rysiew characterizes the Reidian notion of evidence as evidentness to a properly functioning epistemic subject, rather than as a relationship between propositions (Rysiew 2005: 112). A belief is self-evident where the belief provides its own ground for acceptance, and, in properly functioning epistemic agents, the belief compels assent. It cannot be the case that a self-evident proposition must be a tautology, since the self-evident principles of common sense are not tautologies. So evidence need not be a relationship between propositions, since on this view something could only be self-evident if the proposition supported itself. Instead, evidence is determined by a tendency to compel belief in a reasonable subject. Self-evidence can be defined in terms of being unable to doubt without giving over to lunacy, just as self-criticism is a matter of seeing the impossibility of experiencing doubt, without giving up our position as reasonable inquirers.

Beyond their natural irresistibility, doubting the first principles is tantamount to rejecting epistemic agency. Reid writes, ‘if we could, by a determined obstinacy, shake off the principles of our nature, this is not to act the philosopher, but the fool or the madman’ (*IHM*: 37). Rejecting the first principles of contingent truth is taking on a vastly different epistemic character. Succeeding at doubting the first is a form a lunacy, and when our philosophical skepticism temporarily overtakes

common sense and causes real doubt concerning the dictates of common sense, one suffers ‘metaphysical lunacy’ (*IHM*: 215–216). If we recognize that the first principles are required for reasoning and for justifying other, non-foundational beliefs, then we see that rejecting them prevents us from pursuing epistemic goals such as believing reasonably.

Rysiew argues that in Reid’s analysis, ‘we find a linking-up between questions of fact and questions of value – between our manner of forming beliefs, and what makes such beliefs justified, indeed, with our *standard* of justified belief’ (Rysiew forthcoming: 18). For Reid, the normative notion of evidence, and the ‘justifiedness of various beliefs, for example, are contingent upon our being constituted as we are; and, epistemically speaking, they *ground out on* the simple evidentness or manifestness of certain things’ (Rysiew forthcoming: 18). If we do manage to contrive a way to actually doubt the principles, we have essentially given up our claim to believing reasonably, since we require those principles in rationally support of other beliefs.

One might question whether the fact that we cannot bring ourselves to doubt a first principle while maintaining epistemic agency is sufficient for *epistemic* justification. After all, it seems that we still lack the same sort of grounds for believing a first principle as we do other, non-fundamental beliefs. Still, the impossibility of having that sort of support (in our current cognitive condition) does not prevent these beliefs from having rational support. The fact that the principle is necessary for reasoning and we cannot bring ourselves to doubt that principle is a piece of information about that principle. Moreover, given our epistemic situation, this sort of support serves gives rational support to that belief.⁶

What are Reid’s pragmatist commitments? Recall, pragmatist accounts of justification are accounts of controlled or responsible inquiry. Inquiry arises only in the face of experienced doubt, and the fixation of belief by means of controlled inquiry justifies accepting that belief. Reid, like Peirce, distinguishes between real and philosophical doubt, and suggests that the mere possibility of doubt does not call into question a belief’s justificatory status. Reid, like Peirce, maintains that we *can* reason about, and persist in, our first principle beliefs. Doing so is a matter of recognizing the self-evidence of first principles, and such recognition seems to be a product of seeing the psychological indubitability of the principle and realizing the absurdity of doubting the principles, as they are required for reasoning and reasonability at all. This justification is epistemic insofar as acceptance of the first principles is a condition of being a properly functioning epistemic agent, capable of reasonably pursuing the goal of having justified non-foundational beliefs and being creatures that can be called reasonable at all. For Reid, this involves getting ourselves into a position to recognize principles as self-evident given our constitution, and not really dubitable. This position, like Peirce’s recognition that we are not in a position to be able to doubt a principle,

is contingent on our nature as epistemic subjects, and the reasoning practices in which we find ourselves entrenched.

REJOINDER TO BAUMANN'S INITIAL PROBLEM

Above, I outlined a pragmatist approach to epistemic justification, particularly concerning the justification of principles of common sense with reference to C.S. Peirce. Afterwards, we saw that Reid's defense of the first principles of contingent truths makes some of the same commitments that the pragmatist makes, such as the distinction between real and philosophical doubt, and the uniqueness of the reasons available for first-principle beliefs. Here, we turn back to the motivation for drawing comparisons between Reid and pragmatism, namely the charge that the appeal to common sense faces a dilemma between skepticism and dogmatism. Baumann, Magnus, and Lundestad argue that the belief in the principles of common sense cannot be justified epistemically, and justification for those accepting the principles can only come on pragmatic (as opposed to epistemic) grounds. Here, I argue that Reid's Peircean (to be anachronistic) justification avoids both of the horns of Baumann's dilemma, skepticism and dogmatism.

First, does Reid fall prey to skepticism regarding the first principles? Against Baumann and Magnus, we have seen that Reid allows that we *can* reason about first principles, and that these beliefs have evidence to speak for them. This evidence is unique (intuitive rather than demonstrative), and the reasoning about can serve different purposes. We can *identify* some belief as foundational, and a first principle as unreasonably doubted. Even this possibility suggests that the first claim of Baumann and Magnus, that the first principles do not admit any of reasoning, is false. Like Peirce, who claims we cannot 'go behind' first principles, yet maintains we can rationally believe them, Reid maintains that the principles cannot be believed on the basis of more fundamental beliefs, but do admit a form of rational scrutiny. This scrutiny is a form of self-control, to see the first principles in the right perspective. That is, we recognize that principles are self-evident, that doubt does not arise considering them, and that they are required if we are to practice reasoning. Since they do admit of this scrutiny and we can reason about them, Reid avoids the skeptical horn of the dilemma.

Does the appeal to the self-evidence of the principles avoid dogmatism? On justifying the first principles, the appeal to self-evidence resembles Peirce's account of self-criticism. In this process, we attempt to put ourselves in the position to experience the psychological irritation of doubt regarding the belief. Unable to bring on this point of view provides rational support for the belief. Insofar as we can have the potential to believe reasonably, the principles of common sense are required (given the nature of our cognitive lives). To abandon the principles is to take on a vastly different epistemic character, one whose

disinclination to believe the first principles constitutes a form of lunacy, as those principles are required for our epistemic practices. The appeal to self-evidence is not an appeal to a proposition supporting itself; rather, it is an appeal to a belief's manifestness given the nature of our cognitive lives. Against dogmatism, we can appeal to principles' survival of criticism or self-evidence (where both are understood in terms of real indubitability), and its necessity for achieving our epistemic goals, to support the claim that such belief is reasonable.

This justification involves Peircean elements blending epistemic and pragmatic considerations. Doubt of first principles, given our constitution, does not arise in practice; there is no need for inquiry. However, in spite of this lack of a need, our beliefs *can* receive rational support. Reid and Peirce avoid dogmatism by allowing that some form of control can be exercised regarding these beliefs. We can see that doubting them is impossible, given our constitution. We can also see that doubting them is unreasonable, given that there is no reason to privilege one faculty (reason) over another (common sense). The pragmatic appeal is not merely to the fact that taking common sense deliverances as veridical helps us build useful theories; it is that, if we are going to be reasonable and pursue other rational beliefs, we have to accept the principles of common sense. Reid's defense of the principles of common sense avoids dogmatism not by appealing to practical usefulness of common sense, but by appeal to our goal of being rational. In this way, Reid, like Peirce, blends pragmatic considerations like the psychological irritation of doubt with epistemic norms such as reasonableness as tied to forms of inquiry. Types of inquiry and rational support are limited by the nature of the belief supported. In the case of the principles of common sense, this support is an appeal to the inability to experience doubt regarding the principles while not giving up epistemic agency.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Reid's connection to pragmatism is not merely that first principles have conditional utility (à la Baumann), or are inescapable (à la Magnus). Reidian pragmatism, if it is to have a connection to American pragmatism, cannot separate practical from epistemic considerations, as Baumann and Magnus want to do.

Instead, we find new support for Rysiew's claim that pragmatist elements are central to Reid's epistemology. However, these elements are not solely the four theses Putnam identifies: the 'primacy of practice', the rejection of skepticism, the embrace of fallibilism, and the rejection of the fact/value distinction. Rysiew's analysis does not highlight the importance of responsible inquiry and self-criticism in pragmatist epistemology. By narrowing our focus on the epistemology of a foundational figure in American pragmatism, we have established a connection that, I suspect, can be drawn from Reid through Peirce to pragmatism

generally. That connection is the view of epistemic justification of first principles cannot be divorced from inquiry. Regarding first principles, this self-control is exercised by getting those principles in the right view through a process of self-criticism.

Finally, we see that a Reidian response to Baumann's dilemma incorporates pragmatic elements. The response to the dilemma is a matter of asserting neither common sense's utility nor its bare inescapability. Instead, Reid avoids skepticism by affirming that we can identify when we are mistaken regarding them, suggesting that we can make claims regarding the falsity of first principles. Reid avoids dogmatism by offering a picture of the justified belief of first principles as rationally supported by bringing them into the right view, seeing their self-evidence. As in Peirce's process of self-criticism, we acquire information regarding the belief that rationally supports that same belief. We see that we cannot bring ourselves to doubt principles of common sense, that they are not open to reasonable doubt, and that they are required for our pursuit of the epistemic goal of reasonable belief.

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NOTES

- ¹ For example, David Hume writes, 'Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose . . . I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding' (*THN*: 175).
- ² For instance, Cornell West describes pragmatism as a school characterized by 'evading epistemology-centered philosophy', and claims that, 'American pragmatism can be understood as what happens to the Emersonian evasion of epistemology-centered philosophy when forced to justify itself within the perimeters of academic philosophy.' (West 1989: 42).
- ³ One of Peirce's central criticisms of Reid in 'Issues of Pragmaticism' is that Reid does not allow that first principles can change with time. Peirce is committed to a view that evolution allows the possibility of change in our constitution, thus changes in what becomes open to real psychological doubt ([1905] 1958: 208–209).
- ⁴ In 'The Fixation of Belief', Peirce explores different sorts of epistemic characters with different methods of fixing belief. These characters are better or worse depending on the possibility of future inquiry that they allow. If there is no future possibility of inquiry because the agent has somehow changed herself so as to not experience doubt, she has not thereby acquired justification. Instead, she has no claim to being reasonable since she has given up epistemic agency ([1877] 1958: 101–112).
- ⁵ Rysiew (2001) argues that the first principles are constitutive principles; that is, they are those rules by which we must abide by if we are going to be considered reasonable or engaged in reasoning at all. I think this is right, but only part of the story. Importantly, we can do more than recognize the principles as constitutive, we can understand their character as such, and their not being open to reasonable doubt, as a reason to persist in these beliefs.
- ⁶ A contemporary view that resembles this defense is that of Richard Foley. Foley maintains that epistemically rational and justified belief are distinct concepts, but justification has to do with the judgment that one has been a responsible believer.

Rationality, Foley maintains, is a 'goal-oriented notion'. He writes in 'Justified Belief as Responsible Belief',

'Justifiably believing a proposition is a matter of its being rational, all things considered, for one to have acquired (and subsequently retained) the belief. More precisely, one justifiably believes a proposition P if one has an epistemically rational belief that one's procedures with respect to P have been acceptable, that is, acceptable given the limitations on one's time and capacities and given all of one's goals' (Foley 2005: 332).

Here, justified belief is tied to the epistemically rational belief regarding one's epistemic practices. Epistemic rationality is tied to the goal of having accurate and comprehensive beliefs. The acceptability of a procedure is determined by considerations like the amount of time worth devoting to the question, and limitations on our capacities. Responsible, justified, belief is subject to constraints given the sort of evidence and support that the belief in question admits. In the case of foundational beliefs for Peirce and Reid, the evidence they admit is their irresistibility and their necessity in epistemic practices.