

Reid's Third Argument for Moral Liberty

§0 Introduction

Thomas Reid uses the term 'moral liberty' to refer to a kind of free will that is agent-causal and incompatible with determinism.¹ Reid offers three arguments for moral liberty in *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (hereafter, 'EAP'), 4.6-4.8.² The first is that we have a natural conviction that we have moral liberty. The second is that moral responsibility requires moral liberty. The third argument, which appears in EAP 4.8, Reid initially describes as that man has moral liberty 'Because he is able to prosecute an end by a long series of means adapted to it' (EAP 4.5, p. 228). Generally regarded as obscure,³ most commentators either ignore this third argument or lend it cursory attention.⁴

The theistic argument from design features prominently in the puzzling EAP 4.8. According to the design argument, the fact that, say, the distance of the earth from the sun throughout the year is well suited for life indicates that a being both conceived of the goal that there be life on earth and possessed the moral liberty to achieve this end. Likewise, Julius Caesar's actions in conquering Gaul indicate that Caesar conceived of the goal of conquering Gaul and possessed the moral liberty to achieve this end. But does Reid refer to the argument from design *merely* to give an analogy? Or, instead, does he *employ* the premises of the argument from design in his third argument?

¹ Reid does not use the term 'determinism' but instead the term 'the doctrine of necessity', calling those who believe this doctrine 'necessitarians'. An anonymous referee points out that the 18th-century term 'necessitarianism' may have some differences in meaning from 'determinism', which was coined in the 19th-century. If one wishes, one may substitute 'necessitarianism' for 'determinism' throughout this paper.

² I use abbreviations to refer to the following editions of Reid's works: *EAP* for Haakonssen and Harris (ed.) *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010); *EIP* for Brookes and Haakonssen (eds.) *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); and *INQ* for Brookes (ed.) *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

³ Brody, in his introduction to his edition of *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (MIT Press, 1969), calls it 'rather strange' (p. xviii). Lehrer (1989, p. 277) says it is 'surely a difficult one to evaluate fairly'. Madden (1982, p. 337) says it 'adds nothing new to his [Reid's]...characterization of free action as that guided by reason'.

⁴ Rowe, though interpreting Reid's first and second arguments, ignores it in his (1991). Cursory attenders include those mentioned in footnote 3 as well as McDermid (1999) and Harris (2005). Of the cursory attenders, only Harris' interpretation bears much similarity to mine; but as I discuss in footnote 18, there are important differences.

Gideon Yaffe interprets Reid in the former way: the design argument is an analogy. Yaffe draws an account of character traits from Reid's prior discussions in *EAP* 2.3 and 4.4 – in particular, an account of *wisdom*. He then interprets Reid's argument as follows. Consider the rule of conduct that says to take appropriate means to one's ends. Wisdom is a commitment to this rule that is strong enough that others would be justified in expecting one to follow it. A person's prosecution of a goal, by appropriate means, indicates that he has wisdom. But others are not justified in expecting that he will follow the rule *unless* he has the moral liberty required to be persistent in the face of any vicissitudes in his inclinations.⁵

As is evident, for Yaffe, Reid's third argument is logically independent from the design argument, which then must be an analogy. Hence, for Yaffe, Reid's audience can include theist and non-theist alike. This may be a virtue of his interpretation. I will show, though, that attention to the text reveals that this is *not* the argument Reid offers in *EAP* 4.8. In fact, Reid's third argument employs the premises of the design argument.

My interpretation of Reid's argument in *EAP* 4.8 is as follows. The design argument implies something important about any series of events that is well suited to bring about a given state of affairs – viz., that we should hold that some one person *both* conceived of a plan to bring about that state of affairs *and* brought it about through the exercise of moral liberty. But then the view that Julius Caesar lacks moral liberty has the following result. Caesar cannot be the one person who both conceived of the plan for the conquest of Gaul and brought it about through the exercise of moral liberty. Some other person – God, let's say – must have done so. However, since God, then, *both* conceived of the plan and so brought it about, we have no reason to believe that Caesar even conceived of the plan. But this is absurd: surely we have such reason. So we should reject the view that Caesar lacks moral liberty.

⁵ See Yaffe (2004, p. 76-97).

An upshot of my interpretation is that Reid's audience is limited to those who believe in the design argument. Whether or not this is a happy state of affairs, I show that my interpretation is evident in the text. This upshot suggests the moral that we ought not downplay – but, instead, be on the lookout for – effects of Reid's theism on his arguments. In what follows, though, my driving concern is to show that my interpretation of *EAP* 4.8 is, in fact, correct. Additionally, I note that, in this paper, it is not my concern to evaluate Reid's third argument.⁶

The paper is structured as follows. In §1, I relate Yaffe's interpretation of Reid's third argument. In §2, I lay out my interpretation of the argument. In §3, I offer textual support for my interpretation. In §4, I resolve a problem for my interpretation. I conclude in §5.

§1 Yaffe's Interpretation of Reid's Third Argument

EAP 4.8 has 23 paragraphs which I will refer to as 'par. 1', 'par. 2', etc. Par. 2 and par. 4 reveal the puzzling basic structure of Reid's argument:

par. 2 I take it for granted, that, among the various characters of men, there have been some, who, after they came to years of understanding, deliberately laid down a plan of conduct, which they resolved to pursue through life; and that of these, some have steadily pursued the end they had in view, by the proper means (*EAP* 4.8, p. 240).

par. 4 That such conduct in a man demonstrates a certain degree of wisdom and understanding, no man ever doubted; and, I say, it demonstrates, with equal force, a certain degree of power over his voluntary determinations (*Ibid*).

Fix on an example. Julius Caesar deliberately performed a complex series of actions directed at conquering Gaul. Let us call this series of actions 'Caesar's Conquest'. Presumably, Caesar's Conquest includes Caesar's giving specific orders to his generals and much else besides. For ease of expression, let me stipulate that one *actively brings about* a series of actions just in case one exercises moral liberty in performing the actions constitutive of it. Par. 2 and par. 4 reveal a

⁶ Though see footnote 23 for a brief critique of one of Reid's premises, and footnote 22 for how his argument could relate to the debate over artificial intelligence.

modus ponens: If Caesar's Conquest indicates Caesar's wisdom and understanding, then it indicates that Caesar actively brought it about; Caesar's Conquest does indicate Caesar's wisdom and understanding, so it indicates that Caesar actively brought it about. The *hard* premise in this modus ponens is the conditional; Reid's driving concern is to argue for it. The premise that Caesar's Conquest indicates Caesar's wisdom and understanding is, to Reid, a truism 'no man ever doubted'; he does not argue for this *easy* premise.⁷

For Yaffe, the middle term in the modus ponens is 'wise', as follows:⁸

The Hard Premise For Yaffe: If Caesar's Conquest indicates that Caesar is wise, then it indicates that he actively brought it about.

The Easy Premise For Yaffe: Caesar's Conquest indicates that Caesar is wise.

The Conclusion For Yaffe: Caesar's Conquest indicates that Caesar actively brought it about.

Reid's first foray into motivating the hard premise is par. 5. Its three uses of 'wisdom' are suggestive of Yaffe's approach:⁹

par. 5 This [i.e., the hard premise] will appear evident, if we consider, that understanding without power may project, but can execute nothing. A regular plan of conduct, as it cannot be contrived without understanding, so it cannot be carried into execution without power; and, therefore, the execution, as an effect, demonstrates, with equal force, both power and understanding in the cause. Every indication of wisdom, taken from the effect, is equally an indication of power to execute what wisdom planned. And, if we have any evidence that the wisdom which formed the plan is in the man, we have the very same evidence, that the power which executed it is in him also (*EAP* 4.8, p. 240-241).

Importantly, Yaffe looks outside of *EAP* 4.8 to see if grasping Reid's account of wisdom unlocks his argument.

Yaffe points to *EAP* 2.3 and 4.4, placing wisdom in the genus of *character traits*.¹⁰ A character trait is a fixed commitment to a rule of conduct, where a person S is *fixedly committed*

⁷ In this connection, notice an apparent discrepancy regarding *EAP* 4.8's *conclusion*. *EAP* 4.5 says that it is, along with the other two arguments, that 'man is endowed with moral liberty' (*EAP* 4.5, p. 228), whereas par. 19 says that it is the conditional I have called the hard premise. Since the conclusion that man has moral liberty follows once we add the easy premise, the discrepancy noted is understandable.

⁸ See Yaffe (2004, p. 78-9).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78, where Yaffe quotes par. 5.

to a rule of conduct R just in case two conditions are met. First, S consciously undertakes a pattern of behavior in order to follow R. Second, an inference that S will succeed in following R would be ‘as legitimate as any justified inductive inference’ (Yaffe 2004, p. 87).

To illustrate, suppose that Lisa is a patient listener. Barring exigent circumstances, Lisa kindly listens and asks appropriate questions when someone wants to talk. Lisa is not such that she happens to always enjoy listening and so listens. No, Lisa *would* listen even when it is not enjoyable. Lisa treasures the rule of patient listening: ‘Value people by doing your best to listen to them’. Lisa consciously undertakes a pattern of behavior in order to follow that rule. Further, people who know Lisa are justified in inferring that Lisa *will* patiently listen in diverse situations. Now, Lisa could fail to patiently listen the next opportunity. But similarly, the sun could fail to rise tomorrow. Inductive inference is blocked in neither case. To see why this parallel indeed holds, it is useful to recall that, for Reid, laws of nature are grounded by God’s fixed commitments.¹¹ So, with respect to both Lisa patiently listening and the sun rising, a fixed commitment grounds the inference. In this case, Lisa is fixedly committed to the rule of patient listening, and so has the character trait of being a patient listener.

What is the rule of wisdom? Yaffe points to *EAP* 4.8’s par. 3, where, given that wisdom is the operative notion in the argument, Reid equates wisdom with *prudence*:¹²

par. 3 It is of no consequence in this argument, whether one has made the best choice of his main end or not; whether his end be riches, or power, or fame, or the approbation of his Maker. I suppose only, that he has prudently and steadily pursued it; that, in a long course of deliberate actions, he has taken the means that appeared most conducive to his end, and avoided whatever might cross it (*EAP* 4.8, p. 240).

The rule of wisdom is simple: ‘Take means appropriate to your end’. Consequently, any series of actions well suited for a given end conforms, at least to some degree, to the rule of wisdom.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 79-87.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 87.

¹² Ibid., p. 88.

Enter Yaffe's interpretation of Reid's argument for the hard premise. Begin with the truism that Caesar's Conquest indicates that Caesar is wise. This truism implies that we are justified in expecting Caesar to do the wise thing. For wisdom is a character trait, and hence an inference that Caesar will follow the rule of wisdom is as legitimate as any justified inductive inference. Now, as Reid is thinking of determinism, on determinism, motives determine actions. But there is no saying when one's motives, like fickle weather, will change. So, on determinism, we would *not* be justified in expecting Caesar to do the wise thing: Caesar's best efforts cannot make it the case that he does the wise thing unless he can actively bring about the wise thing despite vicissitudes in his motives. But this implies that Caesar's Conquest does *not* indicate that Caesar is wise, after all.

Here is Yaffe's rendering of the argument:¹⁴

- (i) If Caesar's Conquest indicates that Caesar is wise, then it indicates that he aims at obeying the rule of wisdom, and we are justified in expecting him to do the wise thing.
- (ii) If Caesar's Conquest indicates that Caesar aims at obeying the rule of wisdom, but does not indicate that he actively brought about Caesar's Conquest, then we are not justified in expecting him to do the wise thing.

Therefore,

The Hard Premise For Yaffe: If Caesar's Conquest indicates that Caesar is wise, then it indicates that he actively brought it about.

Before presenting my interpretation, I register a reason to be unsatisfied with Yaffe's. Of *EAP* 4.8's 23 paragraphs, Yaffe directly appeals to only par. 3 – par 5. Otherwise, he builds his interpretation from *EAP* 2.3 and 4.4. This is unsatisfying. If (i) and (ii) were Reid's intention, we should expect them to appear, in some form or other, when Reid fleshes out his argument for his hard premise. And this occurs in par. 6 – par. 23. It may be that Yaffe does not appeal to these paragraphs because (i) and (ii), in fact, are not to be found there.

¹³ Yaffe (2004, p. 89).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

§2 Reid's Third Argument

On my interpretation, Reid's argument is as follows. The design argument for theism is sound, and runs as follows: A series of events well suited to bring about a state of affairs indicates that some person conceived of a plan to bring about that state of affairs. But though conceiving suffices for a plan to exist, it does not suffice for a plan to be enacted. For that, a person must actively bring about the plan. So such series of events also indicate that some person actively brought about the plan corresponding to them. Finally, if a series of events indicates that someone actively brought about a plan, it also indicates that that very person conceived of the plan. Hence the motions of the solar system indicate that some one person both conceived of their order and actively brought this order about – and such a one we call 'God'.

Continuing Reid's argument, the design argument implies something important about *any* series of events that is well suited to bring about a given state of affairs – viz., that we should hold that some one person both conceived of the relevant plan and actively brought it about. But then the view that Julius Caesar did not actively bring about Caesar's Conquest has the following result. Caesar cannot be the one person who both conceived of the relevant plan and actively brought about Caesar's Conquest. Instead, let's say, that person is God. However, since God, then, both conceived of the plan and actively brought about Caesar's Conquest, we have no reason to believe that Caesar even conceived of the plan. But this is absurd: surely we have such reason. So we should reject the view that Caesar did not actively bring about Caesar's Conquest.

I now present Reid's argument more precisely. In addition to 'Caesar's Conquest', which I repeat, the following terminology appears:

Caesar's Conquest The series of actions Julius Caesar performed to conquer Gaul.

The Plan The long-term plan to which Caesar's Conquest corresponds.

Sequence Any series of events well suited to bring about a particular state of affairs.

J[] An operator short for ‘we are justified in believing that []’.¹⁵

Here is my rendering of Reid’s third argument:

- (1) For all Sequences, J[some x conceived of the corresponding plan].
- (2) If: For all Sequences, J[some x conceived of the corresponding plan], then: For all Sequences, J[some x actively brought about the Sequence].
- (3) For all Sequences, J[some x actively brought about the Sequence]. [from (1) and (2)]
- (4) For all x, for all Sequences, J[if x actively brought about the Sequence, then x conceived of the corresponding plan].
- (5) For all Sequences, J[some x both conceived of the corresponding plan and actively brought about the Sequence]. [from (3) and (4)]¹⁶
- (6) For all x, for all Sequences, if not-J[x actively brought about the Sequence], then J[some y distinct from x both conceived of the corresponding plan and actively brought about the Sequence]. [from (5)]
- (7) If not-J[Caesar actively brought about Caesar’s Conquest], then J[some y distinct from Caesar both conceived of The Plan and actively brought about Caesar’s Conquest]. [from (6)]
- (8) If J[some y distinct from Caesar both conceived of The Plan and actively brought about Caesar’s Conquest], then not-J[Caesar conceived of The Plan].

The Hard Premise If J[Caesar conceived of The Plan], then J[Caesar actively brought about Caesar’s Conquest]. [from (7) and (8)]

The Easy Premise J[Caesar conceived of The Plan].

Conclusion J[Caesar actively brought about Caesar’s Conquest].
[from The Hard Premise and The Easy Premise]

In place of Reidian wisdom there is conceivings of plans. And the design argument *appears* in the argument: (5) is, roughly, the conclusion of the design argument.¹⁷ Reid’s

¹⁵ In the sense at issue here, we can be justified in believing something even if we do not, in fact, believe it.

¹⁶ (5) follows from (3) and (4) given that any person justified in believing *that, for some x, F(x) and, for all x, if F(x) then G(x)* is also justified in believing *that, for some x, both F(x) and G(x)*. I thought it best to spare the main text from this quite modest principle.

¹⁷ (5) is not exactly the conclusion of the design argument. It is close, though. For all Sequences not due to humans, angels, etc. – e.g., the motions of the solar system – the relevant agent can only be God. And it is (5) that factors into the rest of Reid’s argument.

innovation is to draw the implication to (6), an instance of which is (7), and then to turn our attention to (8).¹⁸

§3 Textual Justification

§3.1 *The Hard and Easy Premises*

I begin by indicating why I render The Hard and Easy Premises as I do. Reid reiterates his hard premise several times. Observe the following paragraphs:

- par. 10 But if all his [i.e., Caesar's] particular determinations, which concurred in the execution of this plan, were produced, not by himself, but by some cause acting necessarily upon him, then there is no evidence left that he contrived this plan, or that he ever spent a thought about it (*EAP* 4.8, p. 241).
- par. 13 This intelligent being must have understood the plan, and intended to execute it. If this be so, as the man had no hand in the execution, we have not any evidence left, that he had any hand in the contrivance, or even that he is a thinking being (*Ibid.*, p. 241-2).
- par. 16 If, therefore, wise conduct in a man demonstrates, that he has some degree of wisdom, it demonstrates, with equal force and evidence, that he has some degree of power over his own determinations (*Ibid.*, p. 242).
- par. 19 The conclusion of this argument is, That, if the actions and speeches of other men give us sufficient evidence that they are reasonable beings, they give us the same evidence, and the same degree of evidence, that they are free agents (*Ibid.*, p. 242).

¹⁸ It is worth seeing how my interpretation contrasts with Harris' (2005, p. 188-9) interpretation. For Harris, Reid's argument for The Hard Premise runs as follows:

[I]f the choices and decisions which go into the execution of a plan are not made by the agent himself, and are things over which he has no control, then there is no evidence left that the agent knew what he was doing. The agent could, for all that is shown by the appearances, be an automaton controlled by some other being (2005, p. 189).

I will read 'automaton' as 'one who does not conceive of plans'. The idea appears to be this: if we know an agent lacks moral liberty, then it is *consistent* with our evidence that he is an *automaton* controlled by someone else. And this implies that we lack evidence that he conceives of plans. In contrast, (7) says that if we know an agent lacks moral liberty, then it is *implied* by our evidence that he is, *simply*, controlled by someone else. And (8) says that *this* implies that we lack evidence that he conceives of plans.

The contrast ultimately stems from a different reading of the role of the design argument. On my interpretation, the design argument establishes (5), and by implication, (7). But according to Harris, Reid appeals to the design argument to reply to the theistic determinist who accepts The Hard Premise but rejects The Easy Premise. This opponent says that human persons' actions are 'evidence only of the intelligence of their divine creator' (*Ibid.*). According to Harris, Reid's reply is that 'if design is evidence of God's power over his will', then, by parity of reasoning, our actions being well suited for particular ends is evidence of *our* power over our will (*Ibid.*). Now, Reid does address this opponent in par. 21 and par. 22. But his reply does not involve the design argument. In par. 21, he urges that this opponent must accept that God has moral liberty, which implies that there is nothing *impossible* about possessing moral liberty (*EAP* 4.8, p. 242). Then, in par. 22, he stresses that there is no reason to deny that God could create human agents with moral liberty (*Ibid.*, p. 243). Reid's idea is that, in view of this, it is far more plausible for this opponent to accept that we have moral liberty than to reject The Easy Premise. I thank an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to Harris (2005).

We can paraphrase these four paragraphs as follows:

- (a) If it is not the case that Caesar actively brought about Caesar's Conquest, then it is not the case that it indicates that Caesar contrived or spent a thought about The Plan.
- (b) If Caesar contrived The Plan, or is even a thinking being, then Caesar's Conquest indicates that Caesar actively brought it about.
- (c) If Caesar's Conquest indicates that Caesar has some degree of wisdom, it also indicates that Caesar actively brought it about.
- (d) If Caesar's Conquest, or even Caesar's utterances, indicates that he is a reasonable being, then these things indicate that Caesar actively brought about Caesar's Conquest and his utterances.

I have two reasons for rendering the hard premise as The Hard Premise, where the operative notion is conceiving of a plan, and not as The Hard Premise For Yaffe, where the operative notion is Reidian wisdom, i.e., fixed commitment to a rule of conduct. The first is simple: (a) and (b) merely mention Caesar's conceiving (or contriving) The Plan, so it is natural to think of this as the common meaning in (a) – (d), which are all reiterations of Reid's hard premise. It is strained to latch onto (c)'s 'wisdom' and read it in a substantially meatier way. Likewise, it would be strange to so latch onto the occurrences of 'wisdom' in par. 5. 'Wisdom', in *EAP* 4.8, appears to refer to the conceiving of effective long-term plans like The Plan.

My second reason is as follows. As will presently emerge, the other premises of Reid's argument in *EAP* 4.8 are not logically connected to Reidian wisdom. Given this, and given that there are reiterations of Reid's hard premise that do not include the word 'wisdom', to insist that, in even one of its incarnations, Reid's hard premise refers to Reidian wisdom is to insist on an implausibility. This implausibility is that Reid intended *two* arguments in *EAP* 4.8: one that can be generated by reading *EAP* 4.8 with fingers in *EAP* 2.3 and 4.4, the other discernible simply by reading *EAP* 4.8. Clearly, this second reason will be justified, textually, as I proceed.

I turn now to textual support for the rest of the argument, which I divide into two parts. I do this because *EAP* 4.8 reveals two textual phases of Reid’s argument for The Hard Premise. In the first phase, Reid just *says* that The Hard Premise follows ‘from the same principles’ as the design argument (*EAP*, p. 241). In this phase, Reid is concerned with making the relevant principles of the design argument clear. In terms of my formal rendering in §2, the first phase ends with (6), the proposition that if we are not justified in thinking a given entity conceived of a plan for a given Sequence, then we are justified in thinking some *other* entity must have both conceived of the plan and actively brought about the Sequence.

Reid signals the start of the second phase in par. 9: ‘Let us apply these principles [of the design argument] to the supposition we have made’ (*Ibid.*). The supposition made is just that there is some person like Caesar who conceived of The Plan and performed Caesar’s Conquest. My formal rendering represents this second phase with (7) – which is an instance of (6) in terms of Caesar, Caesar’s Conquest, and The Plan – and (8). In this second phase, Reid is concerned with showing *why* The Hard Premise follows from the principles of the design argument that he had clarified in the first phase. That reason is (8): conclusive reason to think that God both conceived of The Plan and actively brought about Caesar’s Conquest leaves us without any reason to think that Caesar even conceived of The Plan.

I now point to the relevant paragraphs and support this interpretation of the two phases.

§3.2 *First Phase: The Principles of the Design Argument*

I begin with par. 7. I label two clauses to facilitate discussion:

par. 7 The effects we observe in the course of nature, require a cause. (a) Effects, wisely adapted to an end, require a wise cause. Every indication of the wisdom of the Creator is equally an indication of his power. His wisdom appears only in the works done by his power; (b) for wisdom without power may speculate, but it cannot act; it may plan, but it cannot execute its plans (*EAP* 4.8, p. 241).

This paragraph is a rehearsal of the design argument. Though Reid does not clearly mark which sentence is the conclusion and which sentences are the premises, (a) should be seen as the conclusion: Wisely adapted effects, i.e. Sequences, indicate a wise cause. As the rest of the paragraph suggests, by ‘cause’ Reid means an agent with moral liberty or ‘power’;¹⁹ further, by a ‘wise’ cause Reid means a planner. So (a) says that some agent actively brought about each Sequence *and* that someone conceived of the corresponding plan. But (a) does not say *only* this, its phrase ‘a wise cause’ strongly suggests that the active agent and the planner is one and the same, and this we call ‘God’. Again, (a) says that each Sequence indicates, or justifies us in thinking, that some one being conceived of the corresponding plan and brought the Sequence about. Or, as in §2,

(5) For all Sequences, J[some x both conceived of the corresponding plan and actively brought about the Sequence].

For Reid’s purposes, (5) is the conclusion of the design argument. Statement (b) contains a premise. Basically, (b) says that if a Sequence justifies us in thinking that someone conceived of the corresponding plan, it also justifies us in thinking that someone actively brought about the Sequence. Or,

(2) If: For all Sequences, J[some x conceived of the corresponding plan], then: For all Sequences, J[some x actively brought about the Sequence].

Now, Reid would not stress (2) unless he assumed

(1) For all Sequences, J[some x conceived of the corresponding plan].

in the context of *EAP* 4.8. Or, perhaps better put, (1) is just the initial intuition of the design argument – viz., that events well suited for a given state of affairs indicate a planner.

¹⁹ Is Reid begging a question by assuming that any x that conceived of the plan for a Sequence and caused the Sequence did so by *actively bringing about* the Sequence? Short answer: Yes. Reid admits as much and refers the reader, in par. 23, to Samuel Clarke’s arguments that ‘the First Cause must be a free agent’ (*EAP* 4.8, p. 243).

Let me illustrate Reid's line of reasoning behind (2). Suppose that I am exploring an island and I stumble across a large arrangement of stones that spell 'Help me!'. What I see justifies me in thinking that someone conceived of a plan to arrange the stones in order to spell these words. This is the analogue of (1). But then I find an abandoned video camera on a ledge overlooking the area that has, in its memory, a recording of the nearby happenings over the past 24 hours. I watch the recording, and, to my surprise, I see that the natural deterministic forces of wind and tide arranged the stones just so. Here, in losing justification for believing that someone actively brought about the arrangement of the stones, I *also* lose justification for believing that someone conceived of a plan. This is the analogue of (2).

Combining (1) with (2) gives us

(3) For all Sequences, J[some x actively brought about the Sequence].

There is a gap from (3) to (5) that the text does not fill. Perhaps this is understandable, because what connects (3) to (5) is an oft-suppressed premise in design arguments. Plausibly, it is best viewed as a background assumption. The idea can be put intuitively. In terms of the illustration of the stones, perhaps I am justified in thinking that someone *who conceived of the plan to spell 'Help me!'* actively brought about the arrangement if I am justified in thinking that someone actively brought it about at all. To put it generally:

(4) For all x, for all Sequences, J[if x actively brought about the Sequence, then x conceived of the corresponding plan].

And (4), with (3), implies (5).

One might wonder *why* Reid assumes (4). Yaffe offers a possible counterexample to (4):

[S]ay the video shows a big, stupid guy carrying stones and placing them where a little smart weakling tells him to. Now I still have evidence that someone conceived the plan and I have evidence that somebody caused the sequence of acts, but I also have evidence that they are different people.²⁰

²⁰

Email communication from Yaffe.

Generalizing: the design argument infers *one* divine being, as opposed to a Smart But Weak God who tells a Strong But Dumb God what to do. But why? Similarly, why does Reid assume (4)?

It is unclear exactly why. But there are two good possibilities. The first possibility is Ockham's Razor. Prefer simpler explanations. On this approach, though it is *possible* that one conceived of the relevant plan and someone *else* actively brought about the Sequence, that is a more complicated explanation. As such, we are never justified in believing it, *unless* we have some independent evidence for it, e.g., Yaffe's version of the abandoned video camera. What we obtain here, of course, is not (4), but instead some (4)* that contains a clause ruling out cases where there is independent evidence for the more complicated explanation. However, as Reid's argument proceeds it will be clear that (4)* would do the necessary work. Let me explain. Reid thinks that Caesar both conceived of The Plan and actively brought about Caesar's Conquest, and wants to convince his audience as much. Assuming that *someone* actively brought about Caesar's Conquest, what is a more complicated explanation than Reid's? Something like Occasionalism: Caesar conceived of The Plan, and then *willed* the acts constitutive of Caesar's Conquest, but *God* is the one who actively brought about each act, and therefore Caesar's Conquest. The reason (4)* would do the necessary work is that there seems to be no independent evidence for views like Occasionalism.

The second possibility: actively bringing something about conceptually implies conceiving of the relevant plan. Distinguish *originating* a plan from *entertaining* it. Yaffe's smart weakling originated the plan, but the dumb strong man still had to conceive of it *in the sense* that he had to entertain – piecemeal, at least – the parts of the plan corresponding to each action. Reid's sympathies may be with this second possibility. As Reid says in *EAP* 1.5,

Now it is evident, that, to constitute the relation between me and my action, my conception of the action, and the will to do it, are essential. For what I never conceived, nor willed, I never did (*EAP* 1.5, p. 33).

For one to actively bring about a Sequence, given the above, one must conceive of the actions constitutive of it. Of course, if this is why Reid assumes (4), he must take his argument to apply given that the conceivings of plans at issue are simply the entertainings of plans.²¹

Textually, Reid's first phase ends with (5). However, it will prove to be easier see the connection between the first and second phases if we transform

(5) For all Sequences, J[some x both conceived of the corresponding plan and actively brought about the Sequence].

into one of its logical implications, i.e.,

(6) For all x, for all Sequences, if not-J[x actively brought about the Sequence], then J[some y distinct from x both conceived of the corresponding plan and actively brought about the Sequence].

§3.3 *Second Phase: Why The Hard Premise Follows*

Observe par. 10 and par. 11:

par. 10 But if all his particular determinations, which concurred in the execution of this plan, were produced, not by himself, but by some cause acting necessarily upon him, then there is no evidence left that he contrived this plan, or that he ever spent a thought about it (*EAP* 4.8, p. 241).

par. 11 The cause that directed all these determinations so wisely, whatever it was, must be a wise and intelligent cause; it must have understood the plan, and have intended the execution of it (*Ibid*).

Par. 10 speaks of the person of par. 2 who laid down a plan and effectively enacted it – for easy illustration, I have let this person be Caesar. Here, Reid applies the principles of the design argument to the case of Caesar. He first supposes that determinism is true, and then infers that

²¹ If the conceivings of plans at issue are simply the entertainings of plans, then one might wonder why Reid frames his argument in terms of long-term and complicated plans like The Plan. For entertaining The Plan boils down to conceiving of each action constitutive of Caesar's Conquest merely piece-by-piece. But then Reid need not have appealed to complicated plans at all, but instead to one's conceiving of a single action. Thanks to Yaffe for bringing up this issue. I would suggest both that it is *true* that Reid need not have appealed to complicated plans and that Reid *knew* this. For Reid, as will become apparent when I address par. 17 in the beginning of §4, takes his argument to apply just as surely to one's conceiving of a single action like an *utterance* as it does to one's conceiving of a complicated plan like The Plan. The explanation of his appeal to complicated plans, as in par. 2 for example, is simply that an example involving a complicated plan like The Plan is more vivid and forceful than an example involving a more humdrum plan.

Caesar's Conquest, in that case, no longer indicates that Caesar so much as thought of The Plan. Reid's inference here is another case of The Hard Premise.

Par. 11 begins to flesh out Reid's reasoning on behalf of The Hard Premise. Here, he draws two implications from the design argument on the supposition that Caesar was determined. First, the cause that *in fact* actively brought about Caesar's Conquest must be something *other than* Caesar. Second, this cause must 'have understood the plan' corresponding to Caesar's Conquest. Combining these two implications, the idea appears to be this: If Caesar did not actively bring about Caesar's Conquest, then some *other* being must have both conceived of The Plan and actively brought about Caesar's Conquest. Putting the idea explicitly in terms of what we are justified in believing, we have the following:

- (7) If not-J[Caesar actively brought about Caesar's Conquest], then J[some y distinct from Caesar both conceived of The Plan and actively brought about Caesar's Conquest].

If my exposition of Reid's first phase is correct, it should not surprise us that Reid states (7) here. For (7) is just a special case of (6), i.e., the proposition that, for *any* given entity, if we are not justified in thinking it actively brought about a given Sequence, we are thereby justified in thinking that some other entity both conceived of the corresponding plan and actively brought about that Sequence. And (6), as §3.2 emphasized, is simply one of (5)'s logical implications.

Enter now the denouement of Reid's reasoning for The Hard Premise. Par. 13 continues to speak of the 'wise and intelligent cause' of par. 11:

- par. 13 This intelligent being must have understood the plan, and intended to execute it. If this be so, as the man had no hand in the execution, we have not any evidence left, that he had any hand in the contrivance, or even that he is a thinking being (*EAP* 4.8, p. 241-2).

Examine the second sentence of par. 13. If this other being, who *actually* actively brought about Caesar's Conquest, *itself* conceived of The Plan, then something important follows. Namely, this

follows: Caesar being determined – having ‘no hand in the execution’ – implies that we have no evidence that Caesar conceived of The Plan. This implication is The Hard Premise. The connecting thought appears to be this: If some being other than Caesar both actively brought about Caesar’s Conquest *and* conceived of The Plan, we no longer have any reason to think that Caesar even conceived of The Plan. That is to say,

(8) If J[some y distinct from Caesar both conceived of The Plan and actively brought about Caesar’s Conquest], then not-J[Caesar conceived of The Plan].

If (8) is not what Reid has in mind, it is hard to see why Reid thinks the other being’s having actively brought about Caesar’s Conquest *and* conceived of The Plan is at all relevant to The Hard Premise. And, since (7) plus (8) implies The Hard Premise, it is easy to see why Reid *would* have (8) in mind.

But, to solidify matters, par. 18 confirms that Reid has (8) in mind:

par. 18 Des Cartes thought that the human body is merely a mechanical engine, and that all its motions and actions are produced by mechanism. If such a machine could be made to speak and to act rationally, we might indeed conclude with certainty, that the maker of it had both reason and active power; but if we once knew, that all the motions of the machine were purely mechanical, we should have no reason to conclude that the man had reason or thought (Ibid., p. 242).

When Reid speaks of Descartes’ ‘mechanical engine’, he refers to a human body whose behavior is mechanistically determined by a designer. Reid supposes that a designer made one such body ‘to speak and to act rationally’. Clearly, this is to suppose that the designer both conceived of the plans for the body’s apparently rational behavior and actively brought this behavior about. Reid concludes that, if we are apprised of the fact that the designer mechanistically determined the body’s behavior in this way, the body’s actions and speech do *not* justify us in believing that it ‘had reason or thought’. To state the idea in terms of the case of Caesar: If we are justified in believing that some other person both conceived of The Plan and actively brought about Caesar’s

Conquest, then we are *not* justified in believing that Caesar even conceived of The Plan. This is (8).

Let me illustrate what I take to be (8)'s intuitive force. Suppose that Fred, a brilliant robotics programmer, constructs ten robots and programs them to perform various long-term sequences of actions. He also constructs them to resemble humans externally, though he himself would recognize them as his robots in some situations, e.g., if he sees a plug (barely) visible on the back of their necks. Four years pass, and, though he forgets precisely what he programmed each of his robots to do, he still remembers that he programmed them. One morning, Fred bumps into what appears to be a businessman whom he observes instructing a construction foreman on a blueprint for a plot of land. Fred recalls that, a year ago, this businessman had purchased this land. Fred believes – naturally – that the man has conceived of some plan regarding the land's use. Then, to his surprise, Fred notices the telltale plug at the back of the apparent businessman's neck. Fred instantly ceases to believe that the "businessman" conceived of any plan, realizing that he himself programmed that robot to do everything it has done and will do. Plausibly, in realizing this, Fred loses any justification for thinking that the robot conceived of a plan. This is an example where what (8) says is the case, intuitively.^{22, 23}

A straightforward combination of (7) and (8) results, by hypothetical argument, in

(9) If not-J[Caesar actively brought about Caesar's Conquest], then not-J[Caesar conceived of The Plan].

²² This example of Fred and his robots brings out how Reid's premise (8) has implications for the debate about artificial intelligence. Suppose that one both denies that artificial intelligence is possible and is a libertarian about free will. This person could use (8) to argue that we are never justified in believing that a robot conceived of a plan. For, to phrase (8) a little differently: if we are justified in believing that someone distinct from a given robot *r* both conceived of the plans corresponding to *r*'s behavior and actively brought this behavior about, then we are not justified in believing that *r* conceived of a plan. And, on libertarianism, the antecedent of this conditional seems *true*, for all robots.

²³ For just this footnote, I offer some critical evaluation of Reid's argument. As I will clarify in §5, Reid's third argument is aimed at those who believe in the design argument. This audience should be comfortable with premises (1) – (7), since (6) and (7) are simply implications of the design argument (i.e., (1) – (5)). But even a determinist who believes in the design argument could resist Reid's argument by denying (8) in the following manner. Such a determinist believes that *she herself* is determined: God both conceives of and brings about every plan related to her life – indeed, *everything* in her life. Suppose that this person asks herself whether she is justified in believing that she conceives of plans, in spite of her belief that God both conceives of and brings about everything in her life. It is clear that she *is* justified in believing that she conceives of plans, because *introspection* reveals unambiguously that she indeed does conceive of plans. But if she is justified in believing that she conceives of plans in spite of God both conceiving and bringing about everything in her life, surely, by parity of reasoning, she is justified in thinking the same of others, like Caesar. And that is to deny (8).

which is the contrapositive form of The Hard Premise. I give (9) here both for clarity's sake and because some of Reid's most forceful paragraphs – e.g., par. 10, par. 13, and par. 18 – point us to The Hard Premise as it is in this contrapositive form. So we have:

The Hard Premise If J[Caesar conceived of The Plan], then J[Caesar actively brought Caesar's Conquest].

I have provided textual justification for the interpretation of Reid's third argument I gave in §2. Now I turn to a problem for my interpretation.

§4 Resolving a Problem for My Interpretation

In §3.1, I presented Reid's reiterations of the hard premise. One of them, par. 13, says that if Caesar 'had no hand in the execution [of Caesar's Conquest], we have not any evidence left, that he had any hand in the contrivance, or *even that he is a thinking being*' (EAP 4.8, p. 241-2, italics mine). Here, our justification for believing that Caesar is *a thinking being* depends on our justification for believing that he actively brought about Caesar's Conquest. Now, observe:

par. 17 All the reason we can assign for believing that our fellow men think and reason, is grounded upon their actions and speeches. If they are not the cause of these, there is no reason left to conclude that they think and reason (EAP 4.8, p. 242).

Par. 17 seems to make our justification for believing that Caesar is a thinking being depend, in addition, on our justification for believing that Caesar actively brought about his utterances.

Reid, here, extends The Hard Premise to the following principle:

Presumption of Power If J[x is a thinking being], then J[x has moral liberty].

There is a problem. Evident from other texts, Reid holds that we are justified in believing that animals think and not justified in believing that they have moral liberty. That is, Reid believes:

Animals Powerless Thinkers J[animals are thinking beings] and not-J[animals have moral liberty].

The problem is that Presumption of Power and Animals Powerless Thinkers conflict.

One might reasonably suggest that *any* interpretation of *EAP* 4.8 must deal with this problem, if it is a problem. However, my interpretation cannot *avoid* it in the manner that Yaffe's interpretation can. Yaffe did not make use of par. 13 or par. 17 to spell out Reid's argument, so he can claim that, in such passages in *EAP* 4.8, Reid falls into some form of exaggeration. On my interpretation, however, these paragraphs indicate reasoning germane to Reid's argument.

What to do? First, I show that Reid really does believe Animals Powerless Thinkers. Then I show that, for Reid, 'a thinking being' is an ambiguous expression. Once disambiguated, Presumption of Power and Animals Powerless Thinkers are actually consistent.

For Reid, facial expressions and body language indicate thoughts:

The first time one sees a stern and fierce look, a contracted brow, and a menacing posture, he concludes that the person is inflamed with anger (*EIP* 6.5, p. 485).

And Reid clearly admits not only that *animals* exhibit such expressions, but also that animals are *wholly* determined. Observe:

Indeed the brutes have some natural signs by which they express their own thoughts, affections and desires, and understand those of others (*INQ* 4.2, p. 51).

A dog, when he is hungry and has meat set before him, may be kept from touching it by the fear of immediate punishment....The animal [the dog] is carried by the strongest moving force. This requires no exertion, no self-government, but passively to yield to the strongest impulse. This, I think brutes always do; therefore we attribute to them neither virtue nor vice (*EAP* 3.2.1, p. 97).

The first passage says that animals express thoughts through natural signs, e.g., facial expressions. The second passage says that everything animals do is determined. Reid here says that animals' behavior indicates thought *and* that animals lack moral liberty. But he would not have said so if he did not think he was justified in saying so. That is, Reid really does believe Animals Powerless Thinkers.

But Reid is *not*, in fact, being inconsistent with Presumption of Power. Two distinct notions of what it means to be a thinking being are afoot. Reid holds that the word ‘thought’ has two senses. This appears in a terse sentence in *EAP* 5.7, the reference of whose pronouns I clarify with bracketed insertions:

We commonly distinguish *feeling* from *thinking*, because it [feeling] hardly deserves the name [of ‘thought’]; and though it [feeling] be in a more general sense [of ‘thought’], a species of thought, is least removed from the passive and inert state of things inanimate (*EAP* 5.7, p. 346).

One sense of ‘thought’ refers to that which is distinguished from feeling; the other, which Reid calls a ‘more general sense’, refers to any mental state whatsoever.

What might this kind of thought that is distinct from feeling *be*? For the move I am adopting to work, it must be a kind that animals do *not* have. For Reid, there is such a kind:

As feeling distinguishes the animal nature from the inanimate; so judging seems to distinguish the rational nature from the merely animal (*Ibid*).

A man may eat from appetite only. So the brutes commonly do. He may eat to please his taste when he has no call of appetite. I believe a brute may do this also. He may eat for the sake of health, when neither appetite nor taste invites. This, as far as I am able to judge, brutes never do (*EAP* 3.2.1, p. 94).

Of the various powers and faculties we possess, there are some which nature seems both to have planted and reared, so as to have left nothing to human industry. Such are the powers which we have in common with the brutes, and which are necessary to the preservation of the individual, or the continuance of the kind (*INQ* 1.2, p. 13).

The actions of brute animals show that they have some thinking principle, though of a nature far inferior to the human mind (*EIP* Preface, p. 12).

The first passage says that animals do not judge, while humans do. The second says that animals never eat food ‘for the sake of health’ but instead only from appetite or taste; this suggests that animals cannot hold certain sophisticated kinds of goals as objects of thought. The third says that the mental powers of animals are both planted and reared by nature, leaving nothing to their

industry; this suggests that animals cannot think non-instinctually. The last summarizes: the thinking principle animals have is ‘far inferior to the human mind’.

The kind of thought distinct from feeling appears to be judging, sophisticated-goal entertaining, and non-instinctual thought.²⁴ Let us call this kind of thought ‘reason’. In *EAP* 4.8, Presumption of Power, I submit, should be disambiguated as

Presumption of Power* If J[x has reason], then J[x has moral liberty].

And Animals Powerless Thinkers, as is clear from the above texts, should be disambiguated as

Animals Powerless Thinkers* J[animals have mental states] and not-J[animals have moral liberty].

Once we attend to the question, *EAP* 4.8 supports my view that Presumption of Power should be disambiguated as Presumption of Power*. Any indication that Reid subsumes things like feelings or sensations under ‘thought’ in *EAP* 4.8 would falsify this view. No such indication exists. On the contrary, a close reading of par. 17 – par 19 suggests that, in *EAP* 4.8, ‘reason’ and ‘thought’ are synonymous. Par. 17 diligently repeats ‘think *and* reason’. In par. 18, we have ‘reason *or* thought’. Does Reid use this ‘or’ as a disjunction between two genuinely distinct possibilities, or instead simply to connect two synonymous terms? Par. 19 suggests the latter; there, the term ‘reasonable’ occurs instead of ‘thinking’. All this by itself suggests that Presumption of Power* is what is at issue in *EAP* 4.8. But combine it with how Reid distinguishes two senses of ‘thought’ in *EAP* 5.7, and that the alternative disambiguation of Presumption of Power lands Reid in conflict with Reid, and no further argument should be necessary that Reid intended Presumption of Power* in *EAP* 4.8.

Since Animals Powerless Thinkers* is consistent with Presumption of Power*, the *prima facie* problem for my interpretation is resolved. And light has been shed on *EAP* 4.8, to boot.

²⁴

It may well be that, for Reid, the three members of this list are neither singly necessary nor jointly exhaustive characteristics of reason.

§5 Conclusion

As I have interpreted Reid's third argument, the premises of the design argument appear. Reid's thought is that, if we suppose determinism is true, we are forced to draw a startling conclusion. Since we must admit that *God* has moral liberty, we infer from the design argument that *he* thought up The Plan and actively brought about Caesar's Conquest. Hence, Caesar's Conquest – all the evidence we have on the matter of whether Caesar thought of The Plan – would have obtained even if Caesar never once thought of Gaul. So with a determinist's cap on, Caesar's Conquest *fails* to rationally compel us to think that Caesar thought of The Plan. Reid finds this result startling, and urges that we reject determinism.

Interestingly, Reid argues that we have moral liberty even though he considers this proposition to be a first principle.²⁵ It is instructive, however, to note these words of Reid:

[A]lthough 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... (*EIP* 6.4, p. 463).²⁶

Reid argues that we have moral liberty in the following sense: he argues that this proposition has the status of a first principle.²⁷ To test a candidate first principle, among the 'certain ways of reasoning' are: *ad hominem*, *ad absurdum*, universal consent, psychologically early appearance, and pragmatic necessity.²⁸

A fruitful question to ask is what form or forms of reasoning Reid employs in his third argument. On my interpretation, Reid appears to employ two forms. Recall how, in §3, I distinguished two textual phases of Reid's third argument. Reid clarifies the principles from the

²⁵ See *EIP* 6.5, p. 478: 'Another first principle, I think, is, That we have some degree of power over our actions, and the determinations of our will.' McDermid (1999, p. 295) suggests that Reid is inconsistent here, for first principles do not admit of proofs.

²⁶ Harris (2003, p. 122) cites this passage and argues, contra McDermid (1999), that Reid is not inconsistent in arguing for first principles as he does in *EAP*.

²⁷ I thank an anonymous referee for insight on how to put this point.

²⁸ *EIP* 6.4, p. 463-7. *Ad hominem*: show that whatever grounds person S has for denying first principle F are also grounds for denying something S accepts. *Ad absurdum*: show that the denial of F leads to absurdity. Universal consent: show that people of sound mind nearly universally believe F. Psychologically early appearance: show that belief in F appears early in our psychological development, which suggests that it is a natural belief. Pragmatic necessity: show that belief in F is necessary for our practical lives.

design argument in the first phase, and then explains how The Hard Premise follows from them, in the second. In this first phase, Reid employs *ad hominem* reasoning. *Ad hominem* reasoning, for Reid, shows that whatever grounds one has for denying some first principle are also grounds for denying something one accepts.²⁹ The thing *accepted* to which Reid appeals is *that the design argument is a sound argument*. Reid thinks that, in view of the second phase of his argument, grounds for determinism turn out to be grounds to *doubt* that the design argument is sound. In the second phase, Reid attempts to show that, due to the principles of the design argument, to deny that we have moral liberty leads to the absurdity that we lack justification for believing that Caesar conceived of The Plan. Hence, in this phase, Reid employs *ad absurdum* reasoning: show that the denial of a first principle leads to an absurdity.

Since Reid's third argument is *ad hominem* in this way, its audience is limited to those who believe in the design argument.³⁰ This is a point to appreciate. To grasp *EAP* 4.8 as Reid intended it, one cannot view his reference to the design argument as merely illustrative and such that the philosophical import of *EAP* 4.8 can be filtered out from the religious background.

Since this is the case in *EAP* 4.8, we can draw the following moral. When approaching other passages in Reid, we ought not downplay – but, instead, be on the lookout for – effects of Reid's theism on his arguments. For example, consider this passage from Reid's *first* argument for moral liberty, in *EAP* 4.6:

If any one of our natural faculties be fallacious, there can be no reason to trust any of them; for he that made one made all.

The genuine dictate of our natural faculties is the voice of God, no less than what he reveals from heaven; and to say that it is fallacious, is to impute a lie to the God of truth (*EAP* 4.6, p. 229).

²⁹ Notice that this usage of *ad hominem* differs from current common usage.

³⁰ An anonymous referee suggests that Reid likely had the theist and determinist Joseph Priestley in mind. Harris (2005, p. 184-194) is instructive in this connection.

Is Reid's reference to the 'voice of God' merely illustrative? Can the philosophical import of *EAP* 4.6 be filtered out from the religious background? One should not assume that the answers to these questions are 'yes'. Rather, the live possibility that Reid relies upon his theism should be explored.³¹ For, in light of *EAP* 4.8, Reid is not averse to doing so.^{32, 33}

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³¹ Does Rowe (1999, p. 105-7) explore this live possibility carefully enough? Plausibly: no. Reid emphasizes God's character. However, Rowe's interpretation does not allow that this is even relevant. But it is possible to interpret Reid in such a way that God's character is relevant.

³² An anonymous referee suggests that we should not be surprised that Reid, at times, relies upon his theism. I agree. However, some interpretations of Reid – e.g., those found in Yaffe (2004) and Rowe (1991) – do not seem particularly sensitive to the possibility that Reid does so in any given case.

³³ For comments and criticisms extremely helpful in the development of this paper, I thank an anonymous referee, Jim Van Cleve, and especially Gideon Yaffe.