

THOMAS REID ON REIDIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEF FORMING FACULTIES:

Is his epistemology of religious
belief what 'contemporary
schoolmen' say it is?

Ryan Nichols and Robert Callergård

Abstract: The role of epistemology in philosophy of religion has transformed the discipline by diverting questions away from traditional metaphysical issues and toward concerns about justification and warrant. Leaders responsible for these changes, including Plantinga, Alston and Draper, use methods and arguments from Scottish Enlightenment figures. In general theists use and cite techniques pioneered by Reid and non-theists use and cite techniques pioneered by Hume, a split reduplicated among cognitive scientists of religion, with Justin Barrett and Scott Atran respectively framing their results in Reid's and in Hume's language and argument. This state of affairs sets our agenda. First we identify Reid's use in the epistemology of religion and in the cognitive science of religion. Then we turn to Reid's texts in an effort to assess the interpretations and extrapolations of Reid given by participants in these debates. The answers to our research questions shed light on what Reid would believe today, were he apprised of the latest research in epistemology of and cognitive science of religion.

1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary philosophers of religion appeal to Thomas Reid's epistemology in efforts to structure debate about the rationality and justification of God's existence. Theist philosophers of religion and epistemologists—'contemporary schoolmen'—also appeal to Thomas Reid's epistemology and philosophy of religion in efforts to mount a response to challenges to the rationality and justification of God's existence. This group of thinkers is correct that Reid probably should be credited with seeding theories influential in contemporary philosophy of religion such as 'Reformed Epistemology,' 'Properly Basic Belief in God,' and 'Skeptical Theism.' The purpose of this paper is to audit the attributions to and extrapolations from Reid made by theist

1 philosophers of religion and epistemologists.

2 We are aware that the moment historians of philosophy become mere fact-
3 checkers of work in contemporary philosophy, the discipline of history of phi-
4 losophy gets redirected to irrelevance—which is not at all to suggest that what
5 pass for business as usual in the history of philosophy ought not be sub-
6 ject to a thoroughly critical review (see Nichols 2006). In our case, we do
7 have interest in whether or not contemporary schoolmen like Plantinga,
8 Alston and Wolterstorff interpret Reid correctly, but it is neither born of a
9 defensiveness about our ‘turf’ as historians nor of a concern that philosophers
10 using Reid have an ethical obligation to get Reid right. They don’t.

11 Nonetheless we are of the opinion that investigating relationship between
12 contemporary theories in philosophy of and cognitive science of religion and
13 their purported origins in Reid is important for several reasons. First, only a
14 project such as this can shed light on whether, say, Plantinga is correct to de-
15 scribe his account of warrant as proper function as ‘Reidian.’ Second, proj-
16 ects of this type have potential to alert latter-day adopters of Reidian theories
17 to some of the consequences of such theories. This is because Reid and most
18 other Early Modern philosophers were system-builders who are more likely
19 to have glimpsed certain consequences to their theoretical commitments in
20 the far reaches of other areas of philosophy than contemporary philosophers.
21 As Jonathan Bennett puts the point, placement in the canon of Early Modern
22 philosophers implies that these thinkers are geniuses from whom we can still
23 learn. Third, if we are able to determine why Reid does and does not follow
24 arguments down paths that contemporary thinkers do, this project will help
25 us better understand the interaction of different parts of Reid’s philosophical
26 system. And lastly, we regard appeal by contemporary philosophers to Early
27 Modern figures as curious and interesting. A project that assesses the accuracy
28 of these conventions of attribution to historical thinkers may illuminate this
29 ubiquitous but strange phenomenon.

30 2 REID IN CONTEMPORARY EPISTEMOLOGY OF RELIGION

31 Alvin Plantinga considers himself an intellectual inheritor of Reidian philo-
32 sophical method going so far as to say that he “hopes to play Elisha to
33 Thomas Reid’s Elijah, thus inheriting Reid’s mantle (II Kings 2:11–15)”
34 (Plantinga 1996, 333). Not coincidentally, philosophers who make use of
35 Thomas Reid’s work in the context of philosophy of religion are typically the-
36 istic philosophers, notably Plantinga and William Alston. Their interpreta-
37 tions of Reid’s epistemology reveals a great deal of subtlety and considerable
38 knowledge of Reid’s texts. In this section we briefly discuss their use of Reid,
39 which begins with reference to Reid’s critique of ‘Classical Foundationalism,’
40 proceeds to an explanation of Reid’s faculty-based account of direct, non-
41 inferential knowledge, and concludes with extrapolation to a Reidian account
42 of warranted, non-inferential religious belief.

43 The *first stage* of Alston and Plantinga’s Reidian justification of religious be-
44 liefs is a ground-clearing move, as it was for Reid. Reid argues that figures
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1 from Descartes to Hume placed misguided, indefensible emphasis on the use
2 of reasoning as a necessary condition for knowledge. By showing that reason-
3 ing is unnecessary for knowledge in countless cases of belief formation
4 Reid paves the way for his account of the automaticity of knowledge. Plantinga
5 makes explicit use of both Reid's strategy and Reid's tactics. As to strategy,
6 Plantinga writes, "Classical Foundationalism has fallen on evil days; and
7 rightly so. As Reid saw and argued, the whole development of modern philo-
8 sophy from Descartes to Hume shows that Classical Foundationalism
9 'taken to its logical conclusion', as they say, yields the consequence that very
10 little, far less than we would ordinarily think, is epistemically acceptable for
11 us" (Plantinga 1993b, 85). Reid writes,

12 The new system admits only one of the principles of common sense
13 as a first principle; and pretends, by strict argumentation, to deduce
14 all the rest from it. That our thoughts, our sensations, and every
15 thing of which we are conscious, hath a real existence, is admitted
16 in this system as a first principle; but everything else must be made
17 evident by the light of reason. Reason must rear the whole fabric of
18 knowledge upon this single principle of consciousness. (IHM 210¹)
19

20 At the level of tactics in the battle against Classical Foundationalism and the
21 privileging of reasoning as a necessary condition on the formation of knowl-
22 edge, Reid has far too many arguments against this position to enter into here
23 (see Nichols 2010; DeBary 2002; Greco 1995; Hanink 1986). For example,
24 in one outstanding argument riddled hard by Alston (1996, 126–7), Reid con-
25 tends that there is no non-circular argument for the reliability and veridical-
26 ity of the faculty of reason. Thus, in Reid's words, epistemological systems
27 that require reasoning for knowledge like Descartes's "hath some original de-
28 fect; that this scepticism is inlaid in it, and reared along with it" (IHM 23).
29 Classical Foundationalism places unreasonably tight and arbitrary constraints
30 on justified belief. A belief has warrant for the Classical Foundationalist, ac-
31 cording to Plantinga, "if and only if I believe it on the basis of experiential
32 propositions that support it (by way of deduction, induction, or abduction);
33 on this view it is required (1) that I believe those experiential propositions, (2)
34 that I believe the proposition in question on the evidential basis of those ex-
35 periential propositions, and (3) that the experiential propositions in fact offer
36 evidential support for the proposition in question. The Reidian view, by con-
37 trast, disputes each of these three points" (Plantinga 1993b, 184). Reid writes,
38 "Reason, says the sceptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought to throw
39 off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, sir,
40 should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception?: they came
41 both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artists; and if he puts
42 one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting
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44 ¹ Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, first pub-
45 lished in Edinburgh 1764. Henceforth referred to as IHM. For Reid's works we use the Edinburgh
edition of Thomas Reid, gen. ed. Knud Haakonssen. See references.

1 another?" (IHM, 169; see also Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of*
2 *Man*, 463, cited in Alston 1991, 151).² At the first stage, Alston and Plantinga
3 endorse and accurately represent Reid's argument against theories that
4 have since come to be associated with 'Classical Foundationalism.'

5 Reid, Alston and Plantinga transition to the *second stage* of their model.
6 Reid diminishes the role of discursive reasoning in formation of justified beliefs
7 and instead broadens evidence to include non-propositional and phenomenal
8 states like sensory experiences. Plantinga inquires, "if it is not the case
9 that the only propositions properly basic for me are those that are either
10 self-evident or about my own immediate experience, then what other sorts of
11 propositions *are* properly basic? According to Thomas Reid, there is nothing
12 but an arbitrary partiality in awarding this status only to propositions of those
13 two sorts..." (Plantinga 1993b, 86). With the ground suitably cleared, they are
14 free to, in Alston's words, "follow the lead of Thomas Reid in taking all our
15 established doxastic practices to be acceptable as such, as innocent until
16 proven guilty. They all deserve to be regarded as *prima facie* rationally engaged
17 in" (Alston 1991, 153). Reid's critique of Classical Foundationalism
18 leads to what Plantinga calls "Reidian foundationalism" (Plantinga 1993a,
19 183), which in turn forms a key feature of what Plantinga earlier called
20 "Reformed Epistemology" (Plantinga 1983).

21 The breadth of 'Reidian' foundations of knowledge lies in the *prima facie*
22 justification or warrant that Reid is alleged to give to beliefs produced by a
23 wide variety of processes. When articulating his theory of warrant as proper
24 function, Plantinga explicitly uses Reid in his discussion of most or all of the
25 belief-forming faculties that get chapter-length treatment in *Warrant and*
26 *Proper Function* (1993b). This pattern of attribution is iterated over memory,
27 belief in other minds, testimony, induction and perception. Given the unparalleled
28 influence of Plantinga's books on warrant on epistemology in the last
29 twenty years, Reid's explicit role in Plantinga's theory is worth appreciation.
30 Memory beliefs are "formed in the *basic* way; that is, I do not reason to them
31 from other propositions, or accept them on the evidential basis of other
32 propositions" (Plantinga 1993a, 61). So are beliefs about other persons.
33 Plantinga quotes Reid: "No man thinks of asking himself what reason he has
34 to believe that his neighbour is a living creature. . . . But, though you should
35 satisfy him of the weakness of the reasons he gives for his belief, you cannot
36 make him in the least doubtful. This belief stands upon another foundation
37 than that of reasoning; and therefore, whether a man can give good reasons
38 for it or not, it is not in his power to shake it off" (EIP, 483; Plantinga 1993a,
39 66). For those knowledgeable of Plantinga's corpus, this use of Reid bears resemblance
40 to a much earlier book-length justification of God's existence, the underappreciated
41 *God and Other Minds* (1967, reissued in 1990).

42 Concerning testimony, Plantinga appeals to Reid's 'Principle of Credulity'
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44 ² Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, first published in Edinburgh 1785, and
45 henceforth referred to as EIP.

1 about which Reid writes: “The wise author of our nature hath planted in the
2 human mind a propensity to rely upon [human testimony] before we can give
3 a reason for doing so” (EIP, 487). Testimonial beliefs that are output in ac-
4 cordance with the Principle of Credulity, says Plantinga, are “held in the basic
5 way, not by way of inductive or abductive evidence from other things I be-
6 lieve” (Plantinga 1993a, 79). Regarding beliefs formed via induction, Plantinga
7 quotes Reid saying we believe that a given unobserved event will resemble
8 like observed events “as soon as we are capable of learning anything from ex-
9 perience; for all experience is grounded upon a belief that the future will be
10 like the past.” (EIP, 489). A similar pattern emerges in Plantinga’s use of Reid
11 in discussion of perceptual beliefs as epistemically basic (Plantinga 1993a,
12 93–5). At both the first and second stages of their model, Alston and Plantinga
13 accurately interpret Reid and show considerable knowledge of primary
14 texts (IHM, 70–71, 129–30, and 169).

15 The argumentation at the second stage shows that beliefs produced by fac-
16 ulties such as memory and perception are justified or rational or warranted
17 immediately and non-inferentially, without need of reasoning. At the *third*
18 *stage* of the model this same analysis of faculties like memory and perception
19 is extended to the formation of religious beliefs in accordance with a form of
20 religious perception. Plantinga and Alston develop an allegedly Reidian case
21 on behalf of the assertion that Christian religious beliefs are rational or justi-
22 fied or warranted when produced by this religious belief forming faculty. Since
23 Reid has shown that non-circular meta-justifications for the belief forming
24 faculty of reason fail, the way is open to a much more egalitarian account of
25 justification.

26 Alston argues that sensory perception possesses similarities with what
27 Alston calls “Christian Mystical Perception.” Since beliefs produced by sen-
28 sory perception are epistemically justified, then beliefs produced by Christian
29 Mystical Perception are justified. Plantinga argues on Reidian grounds for
30 the conditional reliability of a similar faculty with a different name, writing
31 that “the *sensus divinitatis* takes its place along with perception, reason, mem-
32 ory, sympathy, and induction as a source of warrant” (Plantinga 1993b, 86).
33 Elsewhere he says “The Christian believes she knows these central Christian
34 truths—creation and fall into sin—by way of divine revelation. . . . [T]he idea
35 is that the Christian knows these truths by way of the Internal Testimony of
36 the Holy Spirit, which prompts acceptance of what the Bible teaches; more ex-
37 actly, what God intends to teach in the Bible” (Plantinga 1996, 337).

38 Alston and Plantinga do not show—and do not attempt to show—that
39 Reid himself posits such a faculty. What one can find are passages in Reid
40 supporting the commitment that our intellectual faculties were created by
41 God. These include remarks that “Our intellectual powers are wisely fitted by
42 the Author of our nature for the discovery of truth, as far as suits our pres-
43 ent state” (EIP, 527) and that “The genuine dictate of our natural faculties is
44 the voice of God, no less than what he reveals from heaven; and to say that
45 it is fallacious, is to impute a lie to the God of truth” (*Essays on the Active*

1 *Powers of Man*, 229).³ This however falls short of showing that Reid posits
2 a religious belief forming faculty.⁴

3 In Alston's case, he writes that Reid limited positive claims about the exte-
4 rnalist epistemic standing of beliefs to only those beliefs produced by belief
5 forming processes that are typical of our species. The chapter headings of
6 Reid's first book *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Com-*
7 *mon Sense* (1764) reflect this point: Reid analyzes belief forming faculties of
8 smelling, tasting, hearing, touch, and seeing, faculties shared not only with
9 members of our species but also with members of species throughout our
10 phylum. The choice to write a book on the five senses reflects Reid's interest
11 in delivering answers to epistemic questions through consultation of avail-
12 able empirical evidence drawn from determinable, testable observations made
13 about (and with) universal features of human bodies and brains. This transi-
14 tion between the second and third stages of the model represents the thresh-
15 old at which Alston takes leave of Reid with a bevy of rhetorical questions:

16
17 Should we extend our defense to all such practices or should we re-
18 strict it to those practices that are common to all, normal adult
19 human beings? . . . Here let me just say this. Why suppose that the
20 outputs of a practice are unworthy of acceptance because it is en-
21 gaged in by only a part of the population? Why this predilection
22 for egalitarianism in the epistemic sphere, where its credentials are
23 much less impressive than in the political sphere. Why suppose it to
24 be an a priori truth that truth is less likely to be available to a part
25 of the population than to the whole? . . . Here we depart from Reid,
26 who restricted himself to universal practices. (Alston 1991, 169)

27 A natural question is this: If Reid restricts the application of his theory of
28 immediate, non-inferential knowledge to those faculties that are universally
29 possessed by all members of our genus, then why do Alston and Plantinga
30 believe that Reid's account at the second stage forms a suitable model for
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32 ³ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, firsts published in Edinburgh in 1788.
33 Henceforth referred to as EAP. We use the Edinburgh edition, gen. ed. Knud Haakonssen.

34 ⁴ Whether these and other remarks imply for Reid that, without God, we have no knowledge is
35 a matter of considerable controversy, one around which lines have long been drawn. This issue
36 forms an approach to the question: Does Reid believe that God's existence enhances our meta-
37 justification for the reliability of our faculties? Plantinga famously argues that, absent a commit-
38 ment to God's existence, one has an undefeated defeater for all purported knowledge claims. As
39 to the interpretation of Reid, verdicts are split. Richard Popkin (1980, 68) and David Fate Nor-
40 ton (1979, 318) argue that epistemic justification of mundane beliefs from sensory perception
41 for example depend upon Reid's naive appeal to God's existence. James Somerville (1995) and
42 the team of Keith Lehrer and Bradley Warner (2000) argue that God's role in securing epistemic
43 justification is 'detachable' for Reid. Reid's description of the origins of first principles varies be-
44 tween phrases like "the gift of Heaven," "the gift of nature," and "the gift of Nature," phrases
45 Reid appears to use interchangeably. According to Somerville, this indicates Reid's talk of God's
design of our faculties does not function as an argument for their reliability; rather, these remarks
amount "to no more than pious reminders for the faithful" (Somerville 1995, 356; see DeBary
2002, 182–3). Though we note this lively issue, we set it aside since this concerns implications of
the justification of God's existence rather than the justification of beliefs about God's existence
in the first place, our present concern.

1 religious belief forming and “socially established doxastic” practices (Alston
2 1991, 194) that Alston and Plantinga do not consider universal?

3 Alston hints at an answer to this question by praising Reid for his advocacy
4 of the “irreducible plurality of doxastic practices.” This remark occurs in the
5 context of Alston’s response to an objection to Christian Mystical Perception,
6 according to which ‘CMP’ is not a belief forming practice that produces epis-
7 temically justified beliefs because the beliefs it produces are relevantly dis-
8 similar from the beliefs produced by ‘SP,’ sensory perception. Alston writes,
9 “The objection to CMP I have been considering is guilty of the same kind of
10 chauvinism as Plato’s and Descartes’s low assessment of SP as lacking the pre-
11 cision, stability, and certainty of mathematics and Hume’s low assessment of
12 inductive reasoning as lacking the conclusiveness of deductive reasoning.
13 These last analogues highlight the way in which I have been stressing the ir-
14 reducible plurality of doxastic practices in the tradition of Reid” (Alston
15 1991, 220).

16 But Alston’s appeal to Reid’s “irreducible plurality of doxastic practices”
17 in the transition from the second to the third stages of his model rings hollow.
18 Alston finds himself appealing to sensible, doughty Reid at a delicate moment
19 in Alston’s book-length argument for Christian Mystical Perception. (This
20 parallels Plantinga’s use of Reid in *Warranted Christian Belief* [2000, 130].)
21 Alston’s interpretation of Reid as an “irreducible pluralist” appears motivated
22 by a need to have a hero and noteworthy historical figure on his side, but
23 Reid’s own faculty-based externalist epistemology would not and did not in-
24 clude Christian Mystical Perception or a *Sensus Divinitatis*. At this point
25 Alston’s tone grows increasingly rhetorical and he peppers his discussion with
26 repeated moral terms of guilt and blame that target his opponents. His op-
27 ponent or his opponent’s position is “guilty” (220). His opponent advocates
28 an “unthinking parochialism or chauvinism, or epistemic *imperialism*” (his
29 italics). The game played by one named opponent (Gaskin 1984) “has been
30 rigged from the start” (Alston 1991, 220). Since these opponents are guilty of
31 epistemic imperialism—and are immoral people to boot, it follows for Alston
32 that beliefs produced by CMP are *prima facie* justified. Reid himself of course
33 was not above the odd *ad hominem* argument—or fallacy.

34 Set aside problems with Alston’s argument *ad hominem* to ask a more per-
35 tinent question. What is Reid’s actual stance on the existence of a religious
36 belief forming faculty? We hypothesize that Reid’s philosophical method and
37 his philosophy of science steered him in this context toward universally
38 possessed faculties and away from enculturated, religious faculties. We offer
39 reasons to doubt that Reid would endorse the epistemologies of religious
40 belief offered by contemporary schoolmen.⁵

41 ⁵ If there is a fourth stage in the model proposed by Plantinga and Alston it would compose
42 Plantinga’s offensive tactic against naturalism, viz. his argument that, if one believes naturalism,
43 then one has an undefeated defeater for any purportedly justified belief (in Plantinga 1993). Reid
44 does not appear to endorse the conclusion of Plantinga’s argument that belief in naturalism func-
45 tions as an undefeated defeater. It appears that for Reid beliefs produced by sensory perception
are regarded as truth-apt independent of theological beliefs or facts:

3 REID ON REIDIAN RELIGIOUS BELIEF FORMING FACULTIES

If Reid were to argue that we humans have a religious faculty, we would expect his argument to take shape as a case on behalf of a religious first principle, presumably a first principle of contingent truth. This is because Reid's list of first principles includes affirmations of the veridicality of a number of belief forming faculties. Memory (principle 3), perception (principle 5), deductive reasoning (principle 7), and inductive reasoning (principle 12) are all reliable (EIP 474–490). Prior to Reid's list is his discussion of criteria for identifying first principles and resolving conflicts about them. Unfortunately these criteria do not support a religious belief forming faculty like *Sensus Divinitatis* or Christian Mystical Perception. It is not absurd not to believe in God (EIP 462) where 'absurd' has the technical sense for Reid of contradicting the common sense of mankind. Furthermore, belief in a perfect being does not have "the consent of ages and nations, of the learned and unlearned" (EIP 464), and it is not a belief that is held independently of education and acculturation (EIP 467), which implicitly refers to a universality condition. When concluding his discussion in the chapter "Of first principles in general" (EIP, Essay 6, chapter 4) Reid faces a methodological objection according to which it is "impossible to collect the general opinion of men upon any point whatsoever" (EIP 466) to which he responds with a list of several universal forms of belief. He asks, "Who can doubt whether men have universally believed the existence of a material world? Who can doubt whether men have universally believed that every change that happens in nature must have a cause?" (EIP 466). In contrast, God revealed himself only to a certain group of historical people, the Hebrews, and did not reveal himself universally to all. As the list grows longer we find continued stress on universality as a criterion of contingent and necessary first principles but no mention of universal belief in God or religion.

In addition to considerations indicating that a religious belief forming faculty did not meet Reid's criteria on faculty-based first principles, Reid endorsed a first principle that provided the meta-justificatory functions in his system that God's existence provides for Plantinga and Alston. We refer to what Keith Lehrer has defended widely and has called Reid's 'meta-principle' (Lehrer 1989, 162). Reid writes, "Another first principle, That the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious" (EIP

Shall we say, then, that this belief is the inspiration of the Almighty? I think this may be said in good sense; for I take it to be the immediate effect of our constitution, which is the work of the Almighty. But, if inspiration be understood to imply a persuasion of its coming from God, our belief of the objects of sense is not inspiration; for a man would believe his senses though he had no notion of a Deity. He who is persuaded that he is the workmanship of God, and that it is part of his constitution to believe his senses, may think that a good reason to confirm his belief. But he had the belief before he would give this or any other reason for it. (EIP 231–2, cited in Helm 2004: 113–14)

Our knowledge of the objects of our perceptual beliefs is independent from our knowledge of God's existence and goodness, and most probably independent from the fact of God's existence and goodness.

1 480). He adds, “If any truth can be said to be prior to all others in the order
2 of nature, this seems to have the best claim; because in every instance of as-
3 sent, whether upon intuitive, demonstrative, or probable evidence, the truth
4 of our faculties is taken for granted, and is, as it were, one of the premises on
5 which our assent is grounded” (481). Between the first principle and this gloss
6 on it, Reid decries one attempt to ground claims about justification in the ul-
7 timate bedrock of God’s existence and beneficence, Descartes’s.

8 But in spite of being a dedicated theist Reid shows no inclination to posit
9 let alone argue for a religious belief forming faculty that produces reliable be-
10 liefs in a way comparable with other belief forming faculties like sensory per-
11 ception, memory or induction, and in this respect he parts company with
12 contemporary schoolmen. Why? Are there deeper reasons for Reid’s choice,
13 or did he improperly apply his criteria for first principles?

14 Reid’s philosophy of religion, his natural theology, and his epistemology
15 of religion are areas that merit further interpretive effort, especially since Reid
16 does not present systematic work on these topics—an odd fact given his will-
17 ingness to pick fights with Hume on nearly every other issue.⁶ Whether Reid
18 simply wanted to avoid getting involved in religious controversies, or did not
19 think he had anything sufficiently interesting to publish, is hard to say. To
20 argue that Reid did not believe we have a religious belief forming faculty that
21 produced non-inferential but known beliefs about God is not to say that Reid
22 did not have other arguments on behalf of God’s existence and God’s prop-
23 erties. In his discussion of first principles of necessary truths Reid mentions
24 two principles that are related to belief in God. But these first principles do
25 not posit a religious faculty for apprehension of God’s existence or God’s
26 properties. Reid writes that it is a necessary truth “That whatever begins to
27 exist, must have a cause which produced it” (EIP 497) and secondly, “That
28 design and intelligence in the cause may be inferred, with certainty, from
29 marks or signs of it in the effect” (EIP 503). Reid allows these two principles
30 to serve as premisses in traditional arguments for the existence of God. Not
31 only do they not appeal to or warrant a religious belief forming faculty, but,
32 as Wolterstorff has rightly remarked, “Reid’s arguments for God existence
33 [sic] and nature are entirely peripheral. They occur along the way, incidentally,
34 tucked into discussions of other topics, never formulated with rigor” (Wolter-
35 storff 2004, 96). Reid shows little interest in putting his own stamp on these
36 and related considerations on behalf of the faith; when it comes to articulat-
37 ing a cosmological argument, Reid contented himself by borrowing Samuel
38 Clarke’s (Tuggy 2004, 308).

39 In spite of these difficulties in determining the contours and commitments
40 of Reid’s philosophy of religion, we observe a deep seated motivation for
41 Reid’s lukewarm relationship to that subdiscipline. This motivation derives
42 from Reid’s project to construct a science of the mind by inducing method-
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44 ⁶ Hume’s *Dialogues concerning natural religion* was posthumously published in 1779, so Reid
45 had plenty of time to comment on them thoroughly, had he wished to do so.

1 ontological principles. (Tracing the connections between Reid's Newtonian
2 philosophy of science and his theism is the subject of Callergård 2010.)

3 To see the difference between Reid and contemporary schoolmen on the
4 matter of a religious faculty it helps to consider Reid's criteria for attribution
5 of a faculty to a species: an instance of entering an entity in a descriptive or
6 explanatory account of natural phenomena. As no one disputes that we have
7 powers like memory, perception, conception, reason, taste, sympathy and
8 more, Reid does not need an excuse to structure his *Inquiry* and his *Essays*
9 *on Intellectual Powers* and *Active Powers* accordingly. But when Reid claims
10 that some faculties are sources of certain types of prima facie veridical belief
11 which are "distinct," "original," and sui generis (see IHM 31ff, and EIP 229ff
12 for instances) he makes ontological claims about our frame that go beyond a
13 mere convenient classification, and for that purpose he needs criteria or prin-
14 ciples of evidence for his claims. The subject matter of Reid's science of the
15 mind is human nature or 'the constitution of the mind,' that is, he is studying
16 what is basic, invariant, and universal. In doing so he takes himself to be
17 studying contingent matters, because human nature is the result of choices
18 made by the author of our being. We are this way, but we might have been
19 different.⁷ It is therefore of utmost importance to Reid that an account of the
20 mind be correct, that is, that it correspond to the facts of the human mind as
21 much as an anatomical account of the human body should accurately de-
22 scribe the inner organs (IHM, 12–15).

23 If we should know the works of God, we must consult themselves
24 with attention and humility, without daring to add any thing of ours
25 to what they declare. A just interpretation of nature is the only
26 sound and orthodox philosophy: whatever we add of our own, is
27 apocryphal, and of no authority. (IHM, 12)

29 Hand in hand with this concern for empirical adequacy goes an issue of mod-
30 ern philosophy that bugged Reid, reductionism. Though modern philoso-
31 phers had rightly criticised the Aristotelian abundance of explanatory
32 principles, to Reid's dismay modern philosophers went to the opposite
33 extreme. Descartes's and Hume's minimalist models of the mind are prime
34 examples of this phenomenon (IHM 210f and EIP 347f). Joseph Priestley ar-
35 gued that Reid tended to explain the mind by an abundance of original and
36 unaccountable principles when, in Priestley's view, it would be more scientific
37 to reduce the number of principles as far as possible, and preferably to a small
38 set of laws of association (Priestley 1775, 18f). In what is probably a remark
39 directed at Priestley, Reid wrote, "I believe the original principles of the mind,
40 of which we can give no account, but that such is our constitution, are more
41 in number than is commonly thought. But we ought not to multiply without
42 necessity" (EIP, 349).

44 ⁷ Alternative constitutions figure in Reid's writings, for instance *Angels or the Idomenians* of
45 Reid's non-Euclidean thought-experiment in IHM, ch. 6. section 9.

1 Issues of empirical adequacy and resistance to reductionist schemes of ex-
2 planation illuminate why Reid did not take lightly whether or not to posit a
3 faculty or a first principle, or any other entity. His frequent and famous tirades
4 against ‘hypotheses and conjectures’ (IHM 12, EIP 47ff., and COR, 140) are
5 born out of the fact that he took the aim of natural philosophy to be more
6 than merely producing and choosing the theory that explains the most in the
7 simplest way. The aim of science is to map as accurately as possible nature or
8 creation, and therefore science must try to discover truth or else say nothing
9 at all. From the first of Isaac Newton’s *Regula Philosophandi*, which Reid
10 dubbed “the golden rule” (EIP, 51), he learned that the truth of a theory is an
11 additional and independent condition to its explanatory power. Newton’s rule
12 read “No more causes of natural things should be admitted than are both
13 true and sufficient to explain their phenomena.”⁸ Reid took this to mean that
14 something more than explanatory power is required for a theory to be ac-
15 cepted as a scientific explanation, namely, that there is independent evidence
16 for the laws, principles or entities referred to in theory (EIP, 40, 51, 102;
17 *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 186ff). Newton’s first rule and the
18 message Reid finds in it figure repeatedly through his writings. This does not
19 suggest that the golden rule alone decides the matter of a religious belief form-
20 ing faculty. Rather, with a methodological principle like this in his toolbox, if
21 cognitive scientist Thomas Reid did not posit a religious faculty it was not out
22 of carelessness or because he did not see the consequences of his own episte-
23 mology. It was most probably a principled decision. To posit a religious fac-
24 ulty without sufficient evidence, or merely to “save the phenomena” of
25 religion, would be, as Reid says, “apocryphal, and of no authority,” while
26 “orthodoxy” in the study of mind for Reid would be to follow the method-
27 ological precepts of Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton. And as we saw earlier,
28 religious belief forming faculties like Christian Mystical Perception and the
29 Sensus Divinitatis do not easily pass the criterion of universality, a key crite-
30 rion for determining what are first principles and what is the constitution of
31 our mind.

32 However, it is not Alston or Plantinga that have made the best evidence-
33 based case on behalf of the existence of a religious belief forming faculty. Let’s
34 turn to the case on behalf of such a set of faculties as made by researchers in
35 the cognitive science of religion, and to what Reid would say about it.

36 4 REID IN THE COGNITIVE SCIENCE OF RELIGION 37

38 To this point in the paper we have briefly presented the religious epistemol-
39 ogy of some contemporary schoolmen, focusing our attention on ways that
40 Reid is and is not used in that context. Then we argued that features of Reid’s
41 natural philosophy, including features we would nowadays consider to be
42 drawn from his philosophy of science, indicate that he had principled philo-
43

44 ⁸ Isaac Newton, (1999). *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, (transl. I. B. Cohen and
45 A. Whitman), University of California press: Berkeley. Quotation from p. 794.

1 sophical reasons for denying the existence of a religious belief forming faculty
2 comparable to Alston's Christian Mystical Perception or Plantinga's Sensus
3 Divinitatis—and anyway, he does not affirm such a faculty. But what if Reid
4 knew what we now know about the cognitive science of religion, which in-
5 cludes abundant data supporting the attribution of species-wide propensities
6 supporting formation of something akin to religious beliefs?

7 Justin Barrett and Kelly Clark recently offered an interpretation of data
8 from this field in their paper “Reidian Religious Epistemology and the
9 Cognitive Science of Religion” (2010). Barrett and Clark present an account
10 of “Reidian rationality” that is of a piece with the critique of Classical Founda-
11 tionalism laid out by Alston, Plantinga and others: Reid accepts beliefs as
12 justified—here “rational”—when they are produced immediately and non-
13 reflectively, in the absence of reasoning (Clark and Barrett 2011, 643). Here
14 they draw on Reid's remarks in *Inquiry* (IHM 36–7) about the non-inferential
15 immediacy of beliefs about other minds. Beliefs produced by our natural
16 faculties in accord with Reidian first principles “are rational unless or until
17 one has good reason to cease believing them” (Clark and Barrett 2011, 648).
18 They then remark that we have “good empirical reason, provided by cogni-
19 tive scientists studying religious thought, to believe what some philosophers
20 and theologians affirmed on theological grounds: that we have a matura-
21 tionally natural god-faculty, although “religious faculty” or Sensus Divini-
22 tatis may be more precise and relevant terms” (649). Clark and Barrett present
23 a summary of findings from subfields within cognitive science of religion to
24 substantiate the claim that human beings are universally endowed with a ‘god-
25 faculty.’ Research on the Hyper-Active or Hyper-Sensitive Agency Detection
26 Device (HADD for short), on minimally-counterintuitive concepts, on intu-
27 itive dualism and more suggests that we humans possess innate faculties that
28 prompt beliefs about agency.

29 This is clearly not the place for a review of the inputs and outputs of these
30 mechanisms, or discussion of the relationship between beliefs about God and
31 beliefs produced by these faculties, but a brief summary of these findings is in
32 order. Emerging data suggest that these faculties are probably universal and
33 cross-cultural, though up to now most replications of results have occurred
34 in Western, educated, individualist, rich and democratic pools of participants.
35 HADD effects are not only shown with adults but also in developmental
36 studies with children (Premack and Premack 1995). Studies on HADD fea-
37 ture as part of a broad research program about teleological reasoning (see
38 Bloom 1998). The data on behalf of minimally counterintuitive concepts is
39 drawn from experiments showing a transmission advantage for some ideas
40 and not others. Specifically, concepts with one or two rule-violations are bet-
41 ter retained in memory over medium and long term than are concepts with-
42 out any rule-violations and than concepts with more than two. Here
43 ‘rule-violations’ refers to violations of natural law. The concept of a zombie
44 represents a minimally counter-intuitive concept because zombies are reani-
45 mated after death, in contrast to normal human beings (see Norenzayan et al.

1 2006 and Barrett and Nyhof 2001, which report somewhat different results).
2 Research on intuitive dualism shows that from a very early age human beings
3 have a propensity to attribute distinct properties to body and to mind such
4 that subjects attribute mental states to human beings (and to animals) even
5 after bodily death (Bering 2002; Bloom 2004).

6 Following a review of these and other theories Clark and Barrett argue
7 that, rather than undermining the rationality of belief in God, their support-
8 ing data actually enhance the rationality of belief in God. “God may not be
9 directly or immediately involved in the production of God beliefs, to be sure.
10 But we have seen that the proper cause of beliefs need not be direct or im-
11 mediate. As long as God is the ultimate cause of true beliefs about God, God
12 beliefs may be perfectly fine—even if they are produced by natural processes
13 and God is not in the immediate neighborhood” (659–60). They use Reid in
14 support of this case:

15 We concede that there is no reason to appeal to a god to explain the
16 data of cognitive and evolutionary psychology of religion. The sci-
17 entific practice of cognitive and evolutionary psychology of religion,
18 following Occam’s razor, should not countenance the existence of
19 God in their scientific theories concerning the god-faculty. Agreed.
20 Science should proceed by the principle of simplicity, and so scien-
21 tific appeals to the supernatural are not necessary. But the Reidian
22 does not offer God as a hypothesis that provides a better or more
23 complete scientific explanation of religious beliefs. In fact, the Rei-
24 dian does not offer God as a hypothesis at all. (661)
25

26 Reid, they argue, licenses inferences to the existence of other minds even
27 though there may be simpler explanations for the relevant data. Further-
28 more, Clark and Barrett argue that these religious belief forming processes
29 are not so much “spiritually unreliable” as they are “simply spiritually im-
30 precise or coarse-grained. Perhaps the function of the god-faculty is simply
31 to make humans aware of the broad divine/moral dimension of reality”
32 (665).

33 The position advanced by Clark and Barrett is undoubtedly the most in-
34 teresting extension of Reid into the epistemology of religion, and their use of
35 Reid is compelling. Most importantly their position avoids the problem that
36 we argued in the previous section debilitates the attempts of Alston and
37 Plantinga to extend Reid’s work into what we referred to as the third stage
38 of their argument, the defense of faculties like the *Sensus Divinitatis* and
39 Christian Mystical Perception. Given the supporting data Clark and Barrett
40 cite on behalf of positing religious belief forming faculties across our species,
41 we infer that Reid probably would be very inclined to construe the data as
42 have Clark and Barrett if Reid were alive today. Unlike Alston and Plantinga,
43 Clark and Barrett support their attributions in a language Reid understands.
44 We don’t propose to show this to be true in the short space remaining. Rather
45 we remark on a few issues that require further research to determine whether

1 in light of data from the cognitive science of religion Reid would in fact posit
2 a religious belief forming faculty and, further, whether Reid would infer from
3 the presence of that faculty that the beliefs it produces are likely to be true. In
4 other words, we hope to explain in the following few paragraphs why we are
5 hesitant to conclude that Reid definitely would or definitely would not endorse
6 the principles of Clark and Barrett.

7 In addition to such evidence for faculties and first principles that indicate
8 their ‘universality’ Reid offers several other dialectical means by which con-
9 troversies about first principles can be settled (EIP, 459–467). A compelling
10 future project would involve comparing Reid’s criteria for including a belief
11 forming faculty amongst his list of contingent first principles and his other
12 methodological principles with knowledge produced by cognitive scientists
13 of religion about the input, operation and beliefs output by religious belief
14 forming faculties. A second task would be to compare Reid’s take on these
15 data with the suggestions of Clark and Barrett under the name of a ‘god-
16 faculty.’ We will only indicate two points here on which Reid might part with
17 Barrett and Clark.

18 First, they promote the singularity of this faculty with the term “god-
19 faculty,” which is comparable to sensory perception. Sensory perception in-
20 cludes faculties such as seeing, hearing and more. But this may be a misnomer.
21 Reid’s criteria for first principles as well as his criteria for attribution of a set
22 of phenomena under a law of nature strongly suggest that Reid would think
23 of HADD, the propensity for minimally counterintuitive concepts, intuitive
24 dualism, and other modules in cognitive science as each a distinct faculty
25 evaluable on its own merits. This is because of yet another methodological
26 principle dear to Reid. According to Reid, the procedure by which laws of na-
27 ture are discovered is by *induction*, and accordingly the twelfth principle of
28 contingent truth says that “in the phenomena of nature, what is to be, will
29 probably be like to what has been in familiar circumstances” (EIP, 489). Early
30 on in our lives we need this natural propensity for connecting events as causes
31 and effects, but as we grow up the immediate outputs of this “inductive prin-
32 ciple” are checked by experience. “This principle, like that of credulity, is un-
33 limited in infancy, and gradually restrained and regulated as we grow up. It
34 leads us often into mistakes, but is of infinite advantage upon the whole”
35 (IHM, 199).

36 Scientists look for the most basic regularities there are, and so try to find
37 laws that cover vast arrays of phenomena. In doing so our natural inborn
38 tastes for connections, causes and simplicity easily make us construe theories
39 that are too simplified to account for the reality they are supposed to describe,
40 and it is a recurring problem in science and philosophy that theories too often
41 are proposed and adopted for their simplicity without there being proper
42 work done to ensure that there is independent evidence that entities referred
43 to really exist. In Reid’s view it is the purpose of the second of Newton’s
44 *Regulae Philosophandi* to keep our inborn inductive instinct in check. The
45 rule reads “the causes assigned to natural effects of the same kind must be, so

1 far as possible, the same” (Newton 1999, 796) and Reid emphasizes that sci-
2 ence goes wrong when it sacrifices diversity of phenomena on the altar of
3 simplicity.

4 Men are naturally more prone to observe the similitude of effects,
5 which may lead to the belief of their being of the same kind, than
6 their differences, which might shew them to be of a different kind.
7 The proper caution therefore with regard to this Rule is, not That
8 we assign Effects to the same Cause as far as is possible, but that we
9 be sure the effects be of the same kind before we assign them to the
10 same cause. This caution, though not expressed, seems to be insin-
11 uated by Sir Isaac Newton, by the examples which, for illustration
12 of the Rule, he gives of effects of the same kind. Such as, says he,
13 Respiration in Men and in Brutes, the descent of stones in Europe
14 and in America, light in the Sun and in a culinary fire, the reflection
15 of light in the Earth and in the Planets. (*Reid on the Animate*
16 *Creation*, 189)
17

18 Again this is Reid’s issue with reductionism. Reid gives both the Descartes of
19 matter and motion and the Newton of force and laws their share of criticism
20 for expecting that all nature is accountable by their favorite ontological
21 categories (IHM, 211; EIP, 531ff).

22 This discussion applies to Barrett and Clark’s discussion of a “god-faculty”
23 as follows. First, the Agency Detection Device attributes agency correctly to
24 effects that are caused by agents, whereas the Hyper-Sensitive Agency Detec-
25 tion Device attributes agency incorrectly, by virtue of being hyperactive, to
26 effects that are not caused by agents but instead caused by inanimate objects.
27 Second, the mechanism behind the evident propensity in humans to remem-
28 ber concepts that bear hallmarks of minimally counterintuitive concepts
29 (rather than hyper-counterintuitive concepts and non-counterintuitive con-
30 cepts) outputs beliefs quite different from HADD. Third, the mechanism
31 behind the evident propensity in humans to use a dualist metaphysics to ex-
32 plain causes and effects in this world produced yet a third type of belief out-
33 put. In this case, studies about intuitive dualism often reveal that people,
34 especially children, are likely to attribute mental states to persons even when
35 those persons are hypothesized to have experienced bodily death. Envision a
36 three-circle Venn diagram, with one circle representing the doxastic output of
37 each of just these three mechanisms: MCI cognition, HADD, and intuitive
38 dualism. The resulting area common to all three, if in fact available data show
39 it exists at all, will be exceedingly small. As Reid says, we ought to assign the
40 same effects to the same cause. But the effects of the panoply of mechanisms
41 that Clark and Barrett classify as a singular “god-faculty” do not appear rel-
42 evantly similar. We infer that current results in cognitive science of religion do
43 not yield sufficient justification to posit a “god-faculty,” a *Sensus Divinitatis*
44
45

1 or Christian Mystical Perception.⁹

2 This raises a related Reidian point. Since Reid in fact proposes a diversity
3 of principles that seem to fall under the rubric of the general faculty proposed
4 by Clark and Barrett, this indicates that Reid would not think of religion as
5 one distinct type of belief. Reid already has principles of testimony (from
6 scriptures and people), design (to fuel some arguments), causality (to reason
7 about a first cause), induction (to support natural theology), credulity (to trust
8 parents and priests) etc., all of which contribute in their different ways to
9 what is usually called religion. We doubt Reid would hold that 'religion' is a
10 cognitive phenomena with sufficient unity to merit consideration as a first
11 principle.

12 5 CONCLUSION

13 If our understanding of Reid on religion and religious belief is correct, then
14 contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists like Plantinga, Alston,
15 Wolterstorff, Clark and Barrett correctly interpret most of Reid's epistemic
16 commitments. But some in this group incorrectly believe that Reid would
17 believe in or justify the existence of a 'god-faculty.' This group of thinkers
18 considers early modern schoolmen like Reid to be authorities, but one might
19 argue from the foregoing considerations that these contemporary schoolmen
20 tend to select features of Reid's philosophical system that support their own
21 views while ignoring features of Reid that counter their views. It happens that
22 this mirrors Reid's own tendencies when philosophizing about matters that
23 represented threats to his own religious commitments. We conclude with a
24 brief remark about this feature of Reid's method and metaphilosophy.

25 Reid often appears a modest Newtonian concerned with a strict, judicious
26 evaluation of observational evidence, one who avoids positing efficient causes
27 and other empirically unsupported hypotheses. For example, he writes sternly
28 that "supposing natural philosophy brought to its utmost perfection, it does
29 not discover the efficient cause of any one phenomenon in nature. . . .
30 Natural philosophers . . . have discovered many of her laws . . . but they have
31 never discovered the efficient cause of any one phenomenon" (EAP, 38). Yet
32 as we have argued independently, Reid's Newtonianism *as applied to the mind*
33 is more a marketing technique on his part than a substantive method (Cal-
34 lergård 2013), and anyway his Newtonianism about the mind appears
35 strongly motivated to preserve his religious commitments to a substantive
36 soul, among other things (Nichols 2007, 19; Nichols 2009). Despite endors-
37 ing Newtonianism and banning efficient causes in scientific explanations,
38

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41 ⁹ Clark and Barrett explicitly raise the issue discussed here but they avoid its discussion, saying
42 only "We leave aside discussion of the exact nature of the god-faculty: is it a single module of the
43 mind-brain or is it a complex involving various parts of the mind-brain?" (652). Note that almost
44 certainly the neurological correlates to HADD, minimally counterintuitive concepts, intuitive du-
45 alism and other mechanisms discovered by cognitive science of religion differ significantly. As
important, the cognitive outputs of these theories differ greatly. It is this latter point that we fear
will greatly reduce the epistemic relevance of these faculties for the justification of belief in God.

1 Reid nonetheless states for example that each vegetable has in it an immate-
2 rial being causing certain effects that are necessary for the fulfillment of the
3 vegetable's life processes. He writes, "we may draw these two conclusions. I
4 That all the inanimate Matter that falls within our view is constantly acted
5 upon by something immaterial. 2ly That both vegetables and Animals are
6 United to something immaterial, by such a Union as we conceive between
7 Soul and Body, which Union continues while the Animal or Vegetable is alive,
8 & is dissolved when it dies" (AC 218–219; see AC 229).

9 This and other examples like it show that Reid picks and chooses certain
10 metaphysical and epistemological commitments to accord with his supernat-
11 ural religious commitments. Insofar as contemporary philosophers appeal to
12 Reid as an historical anchor for the dissemination of a position, their inter-
13 pretation of Reid's system as a whole is beside the point. For many contem-
14 porary schoolmen, the appeals to Reid are detachable from their positions.
15 And yet their approach risks cherry picking, that is, picking and choosing
16 only what supports their views and neglecting what does not.

17 This can be masked to some extent by re-branding Reid in a way that
18 minimizes those of his commitments that arise not from honest, open truth-
19 seeking but from an interest in preserving his pre-philosophical views. One
20 contemporary schoolman plays down some of Reid's uncomfortable com-
21 mitments by emphasizing the "darkness" and "mystery" in Reid. Quoting
22 the above passage about Reid's ban on efficient causation from scientific
23 explanation (from EAP 38), Nicholas Wolterstorff writes, "What lies at the
24 bottom of Reidian epistemological piety is acknowledging the darkness—or
25 the 'mystery,' as Reid sometimes calls it. . . . [I]t becomes evident that dark-
26 ness is one of the most pervasive themes in his writings" (Wolterstorff 2001,
27 256; see 259). But Wolterstorff masks a disquieting problem in Reid by prais-
28 ing him for his "piety," "humility and active gratitude," and "trust" (2001,
29 260f). Reid appears to select skeptical positions in part because they prevent
30 knowledge of physicalist efficient causes for mental phenomena, causes that
31 threaten to squeeze "immaterial" beings and "souls" out of the explanatory
32 chain.

33 Picking and choosing like this is a tendency found as frequently in histori-
34 cal figures like Reid as in contemporary philosophers of religion in their in-
35 terpretations of him (see Draper and Nichols 2011). But this is nothing new,
36 nor is it the end of the world. The important point is that this particular group
37 of thinkers—Reid, Plantinga, Alston, and Clark and Barrett—makes signifi-
38 cant contributions to answering the Big Questions and philosophy is the
39 better for it. The remaining question is not *whether* these thinkers are Reidi-
40 ans but rather *how* Reidian are they?¹⁰

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Ryan Nichols
Centre for Human Evolution, Cognition, and Culture (HECC)
University of British Columbia
1871 West Mall,
Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z2, Canada

Department of Philosophy
California State University, Fullerton
800 North State College Blvd
Humanities 311/313
Fullerton CA 92834-6868 USA
E-mail: rnichols@fullerton.edu

Robert Callergård
Department of Philosophy
Stockholm University
SE-106 91 Sweden
email: robert.callergard@philosophy.su.se

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AUTHOR'S PROOF

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