

REID AND HUME ON MEMORY¹

I

It might be held that we experience time in the way we experience space. Just as vision makes us aware of objects spread out around us, so all of our senses make us aware of objects existing over a certain interval of time terminating at the present moment. On this view of sensory experience, when I look at a second hand sweeping around the face of a clock, I sense the movement of the hand. I do not sense only its presence at a single point on the circumference while remembering its presence at successively more remote points at successively earlier times. Instead, I sense the existence of the second hand at the earlier moment in the same way that I sense an object on the left hand side of my visual field. From “here,” my current vantage point, my vision opens to take in an object over there, on the left. So from “now,” the current moment, my senses open to take in earlier states of affairs. Just as my visual experience is not restricted to the central point of my visual field, so it is not restricted to the present moment. The same holds of the other sensory modalities. And just as I can perform experiments to measure the approximate bounds of my peripheral vision, so I can perform experiments to determine the approximate bounds of the sensible temporal interval. My experience of this interval is much like the experience I have of my surroundings while looking through the window of a moving vehicle. New objects enter on the leading edge as others disappear over the trailing edge. At any one moment I sense not only the central (or presently existing) objects, but those immediately surrounding them (or their immediate predecessors), those immediately surrounding those immediate surroundings (or the predecessors of those predecessors), and so on out (or back) for a certain interval. I do not, importantly, sense the predecessors as existing *now*, any more than I sense peripheral objects as existing at the center. I sense them *from* now, my current vantage moment, as existing at earlier times, in just the same way that I sense them from here, my current vantage point, as existing in remote places. But, just as my visual field is bounded, so the temporal sensible field is bounded. My senses only take me back so far. Beyond that point, I must rely on memory.

The account of temporal experience I have just articulated is not a popular one. It contradicts the opinions that what is past does not exist and that what does not exist cannot be an object of perceptual experience. These opinions entail that we cannot sense anything that does not occur at the present moment. To be aware of anything that happened in the past, however proximate to the present moment it may be, we must rely on memory. I cannot, therefore, sense the sweep of the second hand. The most I can manage is to sense its instantaneous presence at a point while currently performing an act of remembering its presence at successively more remote points at successively earlier times. I refer to this second account of temporal awareness as the “presentist” account. I refer to the first one as the “expansivist” account.

Thomas Reid could easily have endorsed the expansivist account of temporal awareness. He held that perception involves conception and that we can conceive what does not exist, and hence what does not exist at the present moment (*Intellectual powers* IV.1: 311/11-15; IV.2: 321/18-24).² He therefore had at his disposal a theoretical apparatus that would have allowed him to declare that when we perceive we do not just conceive an object and believe in its present existence, we rather conceive an object as present or past, or as moving or altering over time, and we believe in its existence or in the existence of its successive states at these moments of time, in the same way that we believe in the existence of various objects or their parts at various visible positions.

It might be objected that, though Reid could have said these things, he did not.

[I]f we speak strictly and philosophically, no kind of succession can be an object either of the senses, or of consciousness; because the operations of both are confined to the present point of time, and there can be no succession in a point of time; and on that account the motion of a body, which is a successive change of place, could not be observed by the senses alone without the aid of memory.

...

... [T]hough in common language we speak with perfect propriety and truth, when we say, that we see a body move, and that motion is an object of sense, yet when as Philosophers we distinguish accurately the province of sense from that of memory, we can no more see what is past, though but a moment ago, than we can remember what is present; so that speaking philosophically, it is only by the aid of memory that we discern motion, or any succession whatsoever. [*Intellectual Powers* III.5: 270/14-20 and 271/18-25]

For Reid, the view that we perceive an interval of time is a mistake, resulting from a common extension of terms used to denote the present to refer to a small interval of time terminating in the present, and a corresponding extension of the power of sense — which by definition is taken to be the power of knowing what exists “at present” — across this interval [*Intellectual Powers* III.5: 270/21-271/17].

Nonetheless, there remains a sense in which Reid’s position on temporal awareness is expansivist rather than presentist. This is a consequence of his views on what it means to remember. For Reid, to remember is not to contemplate a currently existing trace or image of a past object. It is to perform an act of conceiving an object that does not now exist, but that did exist in the past. Reid’s commitment to this view is clear.

Suppose that once, and only once, I smelled a tuberose in a certain room, where it grew in a pot, and gave a very grateful perfume. Next day I relate what I saw and smelled. When I attend as carefully as I can to what passes in my mind in this case, it appears evident, that the very thing I saw yesterday, and the fragrance I smelled, are now the immediate objects of my mind when I remember it. [*Inquiry* II.3: 28/6-11]

As a consequence, Reid did not claim that there is anything non-trivially wrong with the view that we sense across an interval of time from the vantage point of the present moment. His position was that we are in fact immediately aware of an interval time from the vantage point of the present moment. The only thing wrong with saying that we *perceive* an interval from the vantage point of the present moment is that, *by definition*, perception and consciousness are confined to what exists at the infinitesimal present moment, so we simply ought not to call our immediate awareness of anything that falls beyond the bounds of the present a perception. There is nothing at all incoherent in conceiving an object that no longer exists from the vantage point of the present moment and believing in its past existence.

But conception is often employed about objects that neither do, nor did, nor will exist. This is the very nature of this faculty, that its object, though distinctly conceived, may have no existence. Such an object we call a creature of imagination; but this creature never was created. [*Intellectual powers* IV.1: 311/11-15]

Reid's only objection was to *calling* the act of conceiving a past object "perception" rather than "memory." There is no difference in the acts that Reid called "memory" and that the vulgar call "perception" (both are the act of conceiving an object that no longer exists from the vantage point of the present moment). The only difference is in their names. It as if we were to insist that the term "seeing" be applied only to what it is located at the focal point of the visual field and that a different term be used for the act of perceiving peripherally located objects.

The triviality of Reid's disagreement with the expansivist view of temporal awareness is patent. Reid took the expansivist view of temporal awareness to be the common view, and he claimed that "this contradiction between the Philosopher and the vulgar [over whether temporal awareness is confined to the present moment or expands over an interval] is apparent only, and not real," and that the vulgar speak with "perfect propriety and truth" when they speak of themselves as seeing a body move [*Intellectual Powers* III.5: 270/24-25 and 271/18-20]. On both what Reid called the "philosophical" and the "common" views, when I see a second hand sweep across the face of a clock I now perform

an act of conceiving. That act of conception has the second hand at successively more remote places at successively earlier times as its object. I believe this object of my conception to exist as I conceive it, that is, to exist at each place at the corresponding time. And this belief is reliably correct. If we pick out the reliably accurate conception and belief of the object as existing at one of these times, the present moment, and apply a special term to this particular act, the distinction is merely verbal.

To be clear, the acts occur only at the present moment; it is only some of the objects of the acts that are past. Reid was not endorsing the view that the present moment takes up an interval (sometimes called the view that there is a specious present). He was endorsing the view that we perceive an interval from the vantage point of the present moment.

Because the difference between the view Reid endorsed and the one that he considered to be common is merely trivial, I consider Reid to have been an expansivist in all but the name.

II

Reid opposed his view to another one, which he considered to be the doctrine of the ideal theory. This view is identical to what I earlier called the presentist view, the view that memory involves perceiving a currently existing trace or image of the past object.

Philosophers indeed tell me, that the immediate object of my memory and imagination in this case, is not the past sensation, but an idea of it, an image, phantasm, or species of the odour I smelled: that this idea now exists in my mind, or in my sensorium; and the mind contemplating this present idea; finds it a representation of what is past, or of what may exist; and accordingly calls it memory, or imagination. This is the doctrine of the ideal philosophy [*Inquiry* II.3: 28/15-24].

Reid claimed that this view is question-begging. The mind cannot "find" a currently existing idea to be a representation of what is past without comparing the present idea with the past object, which presupposes precisely the more direct, expansivist means of cognizing the past that the theory proposes to deny.

[W]hether we perceive [currently existing ideas of memory] to be the same, or only like to those we had before, this perception, one would think, supposes a remembrance of those we had before, otherwise the similitude or identity could not be perceived. [*Intellectual Powers* III.7: 285/8-11]

Hume had committed just this mistake, in Reid's estimation. Hume had written:

We find by experience, that when any impression has been present with the mind, it again makes its appearance there as an idea; and ... retains a considerable degree of its first vivacity. [*Treatise* 1.3.3.1]

Citing Hume's phrase, "find by experience" Reid charged that Hume had "defined" memory as a vivacious copy of a past impression. And he objected that this (presentist) account of memory "takes for granted the very kind of [expansivist] memory [that it] rejects."

According to vulgar apprehension, memory is an immediate knowledge of something past. [Hume] does not admit that there is any such knowledge in the human mind. He maintains that memory is nothing but a present idea or impression. But, in defining what he takes memory to be, he takes for granted the kind of memory which he rejects. For can we find by experience, that an impression, after its first appearance to the mind, makes a second, and a third, with different degrees of strength and vivacity, if we have not so distinct a remembrance of its first appearance, as enables us to know it, upon its second and third, notwithstanding that, in the interval, it has undergone a very considerable change?

... So it appears from Mr Hume's account of this matter, that he found himself to have that kind of memory, which he acknowledges and defines, by exercising that kind which he rejects. [*Intellectual Powers* III.7: 287/29-288/3]

But there is more to Hume's account of memory than Reid recognized. And though Hume's account is by no means identical to Reid's, it can no more be identified with the presentist account than Reid's own.

III

Hume's aim in *Treatise* 1.1.3, which Reid drew on in levelling his attack, was not to specify necessary and sufficient conditions for memory. It was just to identify some "differences" between memory and imagination. The greater vivacity of memories is just one of these differences. Hume also noted that memories are "ty'd down" to a certain order. Reid made no mention of this, but Hume's opinion in the very section of the *Treatise* Reid had cited, was that "The chief exercise of the memory is not to preserve the simple ideas, but their order and position" (*Treatise* 1.1.3.3).

In Reid's defence, Hume later remarked that this second difference is of no use to us in distinguishing between memory and imagination.

[T]ho' it be a peculiar property of the memory to preserve the original order and position of its ideas, while the imagination transposes and changes them, as it pleases; yet this difference is not sufficient to distinguish them in their operation, or make us know the one from the other; it being impossible to recal the past impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas, and see whether their arrangement be exactly similar. [*Treatise* 1.3.5.3]

Interestingly, Hume's remark is motivated by the very concern Reid later raised, that the appeal to the preservation of the order of perceptions presupposes an unrecognized kind of memory as the ground of the sort of memory being explained.

It might be added that it seems quite possible to imagine a sequence of events that, accidentally, happens to be exactly similar to a sequence of past impressions. This is presumably what happens to the old soldier of *Treatise* 1.3.5.4 (app) who has forgotten the events his companion recounts and who "receives at first all the ideas from the discourse of the other, with the same circumstances of time and place; tho' he considers them as mere fictions of the imagination." So ideas of memory are not distinguished from those of the imagination either by being ordered in a special way (ideas of the imagination may be ordered in that way as well) nor by being known to have the same order as that of past impressions (first, because we cannot recall the past impressions to make the comparison, and second, because even if we were assured of the correspondence we still might, like the old soldier, find that we cannot remember it happening like that, however much credence we may lend to reports that it did).

Hume's reaction to these facts appears to have been to rewrite his account of the differences between memory and imagination around just the first of the differences originally identified in *Treatise* 1.1.3.1, the difference in vivacity. "The difference betwixt [the memory] and the imagination," he concluded at *Treatise* 1.3.5.3, "lies in its superior force and vivacity."

Reid was no happier with this revised account. He charged that, when bereft of its reference to copying the way things were in the past Hume's "definition" no longer identifies anything that is recognizable as a memory. Otherwise put, the "definition" does not supply a sufficient condition for memories.

These definitions of memory and imagination labour under two defects; *first*, That they convey no notion of the thing defined; and, *secondly*, That they may be applied to things of a quite different nature from those that are defined.

When we are said to have a faculty of making a weak impression after a corresponding strong one, it would not be easy to conjecture that this faculty is memory. Suppose a man strikes his head smartly against the wall, this is an impression;

now he has a faculty by which he can repeat this impression with less force, so as not to hurt him; this, by Mr Hume's account, must be memory. [*Intellectual Powers* III.7: 288/38-289/9]

But it is one thing to give an account of the features we pragmatically rely upon in order to distinguish memory from imagination, and another to give a definition of memory, and Hume only appears to have attempted the former, not the latter. Moreover, there is more to the "second difference" of *Treatise* 1.1.3.2 than a cursory consideration might suggest. That difference is not as problematic as Reid supposed, and it is not clear that Hume entirely retracted it in *Treatise* 1.3.5.3.

IV

In *Treatise* 1.1.3.2 Hume claimed that "the memory is in a manner ty'd down" to "the same order and form with the original impressions." Notice that there are two things being said here: first, that memory is "in a manner ty'd down"; and second, that it is tied down to "the same order and form with the original impressions." Giving up on the second of these claims does not entail giving up on the first. Even if we are in no position to say that memory is tied down to the order of the original impressions, we can still say that it is tied down — that one distinguishing feature of memory is that when we remember we feel ourselves constrained to place the ideas in a certain order whereas when we imagine we feel no such constraint.

Hume's subsequent narrowing of his account of memory in *Treatise* 1.3.5.3 to "force and vivacity" is less of a restriction once this element of the account of 1.1.3.2 is appreciated. That is because "force and vivacity" can be of two different sorts. Individual ideas can be forceful or vivacious. But the transition from one idea to another can also have a felt quality. This is an observation that Hume made more explicitly in other contexts (when explaining the idea of necessary connection at *Treatise* 1.3.14.20 and when explaining the difference between interrupted and uninterrupted sequences of impressions on the way to accounting for the origin of the ideas of identity and unperceived existence at *Treatise* 1.4.2.33-34) so it would be uncharitable not to consider whether the notion might apply in this context as well. When we remember, we could feel constrained to take up our ideas in a certain order and could experience a feeling of effort at any attempt to alter this order, just as when we consider chains of cause and effect or chains of resembling ideas we feel similarly constrained. In imagination, in contrast, no such constraint is present. Note that the reservations that Hume expressed in 1.3.5.3 about determining whether the order of ideas in memory corresponds to a past order of impressions do not touch this further notion. The feeling of constraint or ease of transition applies only to the present passage from one idea to the next and makes no reference to a past order of ideas or impressions.

The old soldier of *Treatise* 1.3.5.4 misses the latter sort of force and vivacity as well as the former. The soldier receives ideas in sequence and is assured by his trust in his companion's testimony that this sequence corresponds to the actual sequence of the past events. But just as the old soldier's individual ideas only have the degree of vivacity characteristic of belief and not the higher degree characteristic of memory, so the old soldier does not feel the same resistance that his companion does to considering the ideas in a different order or to replacing some with others. It is not just the individual ideas in the sequence, but the transition from one to the other that has less "force and vivacity."

V

The account I have just sketched raises three questions. First, what are we to make of the notion of an awareness that is not just of an individual idea or a collection of ideas existing at the present moment, but of a temporal sequence of ideas? Second, how could Hume provide for the further notion that the order and position of ideas is tied down? Third, how exactly does this account move Hume out of the ambit of a "presentist" account of memory — an account on which memory involves the consciousness only of what exists at the present moment? The answer to the first of these questions also serves as the answer to the third.

1 (and 3). In *Treatise* 1.1.3.3 Hume compared the preservation of the order and position of ideas in memory to the preservation of the order and position of events by a historian.

An historian may, perhaps, for the more convenient carrying on of his narration, relate an event before another, to which it was in fact posterior; but then he takes notice of this disorder, if he be exact; and by that means replaces the idea in its due position.

Note the phrase "relate an event before another," and the importance Hume attached to the point in the narration where the event is related. The view being expressed here is that the principal means by which an event in a historical narration is ordered and positioned in relation to other events is not by, say, having a date or other immediately apprehensible quality assigned to it, but rather by being described at a certain point in the narration. It is because the historian talks about this event first, and that one second, that the former acquires the status of being prior to the second. In our reception of a historical narration our default assumption is that the temporal order of the original events corresponds to the order in which reports of those events are presented over the course of the narrative. (I say that the temporal order is "by default" the presentational order because Hume recognized that historians can choose to relate events that they consider to have happened earlier at later points in the narration. But precisely because the default assumption of the audience is that the order of presentation is the temporal order, historians need to take special steps to communicate the

proper relation between the events when they make this move — steps that are not otherwise necessary.)

There are some lessons to be drawn from this example. A historian's narration is itself an event that takes some time to occur. During that time first one event is described, then another, so that the events are positioned according to when they are presented in the narration. The time at which the narration occurs can be much later than the time when the original events occurred. But the narration itself takes some time; it does not occur in an instant. (Though the narration takes some time, it generally takes much less time than it took for the original events to occur. Nonetheless, it does take some time.). It is because the narration takes some time, and because the individual events come up at different points over this time, that the individual events acquire their default temporal relation to one another. They are *represented as* having been earlier or later by being *presented earlier* or *presented later* in the later time interval of the narration.

Ideas are positioned in time in the same way that events are positioned in a historical narration. Hume maintained that our impressions and ideas are “disposed in a certain manner” (*Treatise* 1.2.3 and 2.3.7). The manner of disposition of impressions and ideas is not just spatial. Impressions (the auditory impressions of five notes played in succession on a flute, to cite the example of *Treatise* 1.2.3.10) are also disposed after one another over time. Successively occurring impressions constitute a compound impression that takes time to occur and that is divisible into earlier and later parts, just as a historical narrative is a production that takes time to read or hear.

Ideas figure in this picture as well. Having received five successive impressions of flute notes, I might, on subsequent occasions, form five successive ideas of flute notes. These ideas might succeed upon one another far more rapidly than did the original impressions, but they still take some time to occur, and they still occur successively, so that the first one ceases to exist before the second one occurs, the second ceases before the third, and so on. Ideas thus have an order and position with respect to one another that is a function of when they occur, as is the case with the events in a historical narrative.

This can be applied to memory. When we form a memory, we do not just have a single idea that occurs now, at the present moment. We have a series of ideas. The ability to remember is not just the ability to produce an idea, but the ability to produce a sequence of ideas. That sequence of ideas takes time to occur, so that the entire memory cannot be confined to a single moment. Each member of the series is present at the moment that it occurs, but it is only insofar as it is a part of a larger whole that occurs over a stretch of time that it has a temporal position relative to other ideas. In the absence of these surroundings a single idea fails to constitute a memory, regardless of what degree of vivacity it may exhibit.

This suggests that the temporal order of ideas in a memory is not so much an object of awareness as the product of a performance. I do not have an idea of the order of ideas. I have an ability to produce ideas in an order. That ability does not

give me a higher-order idea of a temporal sequence of ideas. It substitutes for such an idea.

There is some intuitive plausibility to this view. When I remember the first four notes of Beethoven's fifth symphony, my memory takes time to occur. During this time I remember first one note, then the next. There is no point, even the last one, at which I remember all four notes at once. My memory of those notes just is my ability to replay them in that order at will.

Seen in this light, Hume's account of memory is in a way more expansivist than Reid's. Reid may have been looking for memory to be the achievement of a conscious thinking substance that exists at the present moment, rather than an operation occurring within an extended and enduring “bundle” of ideas and impressions. That outlook would have induced Reid to consider the entire stream of successively occurring ideas to be taken up and perceived at once at the final moment. Were that the case, Hume could justly be charged with tacitly relying upon some other kind of memory than the one he “defined.” If, once the stream has run its course, I perform an instantaneous act of perceiving each member of the series and how it is related to all the others, then I am remembering in a different way — a way that does not involve successively “narrating” the members in order.

But the view that memory occurs in an instant is not obviously Hume's view. For Hume a mind is not a substance that “perceives” a copy of a past stream of ideas in an instant. It is a bundle of perceptions that change over time. Its knowledge of temporal relations cannot be the product of sitting back from itself, as it were, and perceiving the stream of its contents.

Hume's most explicit presentation of the alternative, “performative” account of memory I have just attributed to him can be found in *Treatise* 2.3.7.2:

[I]n the conception of those objects, which we regard as real and existent, we take them in their proper order and situation, and never leap from one object to another, which is distant from it, without running over, at least in a cursory manner all those objects, which are interpos'd betwixt them. When we reflect, therefore, on any object distant from ourselves, we are oblig'd not only to reach it at first by passing thro' all the intermediate space betwixt ourselves and the object, but also to renew our progress every moment; being every moment recall'd to the consideration of ourselves and our present situation.

In this passage, Hume not only stressed that memories involve a sequence of ideas, he also noted that we position the entire sequence at a particular point in the past by “running over, at least in a cursory manner, all those objects, which are interpos'd betwixt” it and the present. He further thought that when we do this, we survey the intermediate experiences in reverse.

When the object is past, the progression of the thought in passing to it from the present is ... from one point of time to that which is preceding, and from that to another preceding [*Treatise* 2.3.7.8]

We need to be careful not to mistake his meaning. If the memory takes time to occur, and over the time it takes to occur successively more remote ideas are formed, then the more remote ideas must occur at successively *later* times relative to what was the present moment when the sequence started, not at successively *earlier* ones.

This might seem paradoxical or at least incomplete. How do ideas that occur *later* in the sequence denote *earlier* positions in time? And how is memory of the past distinguished from anticipation of the future or sheer fantasy if all involve producing sequences of ideas in a certain order?

VI

2. These questions can be answered by taking note of the second feature of Hume's account of memory. On that account we sometimes experience feelings of "ease" or "effort" while running through a sequence of ideas. Reid was aware that feelings play a role in Hume's account of memory. The ideas in a remembered sequence are individually characterized by a sense of vivacity intermediate between that of beliefs and that of impressions (*Treatise* 1.3.13.19). But Reid seems not to have been aware that Hume also considered the entire sequence to be accompanied by a feeling of "ease" or "effort" (*Treatise* 2.3.7.2). Hume maintained that the identically ordered sequence of ideas can feel more difficult to produce when the sequence is followed in one direction than when it is followed in the reverse direction. As he put it, "We always follow the succession of time in placing our ideas, and from the consideration of any object pass more easily to that, which follows immediately after it, than to that which went before it" (*Treatise* 1.2.7.7). The reverse operation is therefore "contrary to nature" and "continually oppos'd" by "difficulties" (*Treatise* 1.2.7.8).

This is not the best way of making the point. It presupposes what ought to be explained. We can well imagine Reid asking how I know that I always follow the succession of time in placing my ideas unless I "remember" which of my impressions originally occurred first, or how I know that producing ideas from later to earlier is more difficult unless I "remember" what order the impressions originally had, and compare the order of ideas with that of the past impressions in order to note that whenever the former is reversed relative to the latter it is more difficult to produce.

But Hume need not have burdened his account with these liabilities. He could simply have noted that, as a matter of brute fact, certain sequences of ideas are more easily produced in a certain order. Those that are order indifferent, and that consist of members that have minimal vivacity, are called fantasies. Those that are order indifferent, and that consist of members that have some vivacity, are

called beliefs about a set of contemporaneous but currently unperceived objects. Those that are not order indifferent, and that consist of individually vivacious members, are called either memories or anticipations. Memories are by definition "easy" sequences that terminate with impressions or "difficult" sequences that start with impressions (impressions being definitive of the present moment). Anticipations have the opposite character. Again, what makes a sequence of ideas and impressions a memory or an anticipation is just that it has this character, not that there is some background subject who observes the whole sequence, remembers that the initial or terminating member was an impression, remarks on whether the passage from one member to the other was easy or difficult, and judges accordingly. A mind just is a bundle of successively occurring impressions and ideas that have these sorts of features.

We need not hold Hume to maintaining that all the details of this account are always satisfied in every instance of memory. An object associated with some past occurrence, such as a picture or a song, may give rise to an idea that is followed by an "easy progression" terminating in the present moment, thus circumventing the operation of reaching back to the past from the present. And an idea that contains circumstances indicative of time of day or season, youth of objects, or other such singularities that have a definite place in a causal sequence leading up to the present moment (including something as simple and blatant as a date stamp), may be immediately situated in time in virtue of those features. A great deal of what passes for memory falls under the heading Hume titled, "talking instead of thinking" (*Treatise* 1.2.5.21). For example, I associate the term "50 years" with my age, I think that a certain event happened to me when I was a child, and I accordingly situate my ideas of that event 40 years from the current impressions, in the backwards direction, without reviewing all the intervening events in even a cursory fashion. But, for Hume, these more abbreviated memories work with an understanding of memory and the situation of events in past time that is developed by the kind of operation discussed in *Treatise* 2.3.7.

VII

The Augustinian view that what is past does not exist and that the present occupies only a moment of time readily suggests that memory can only occur if past events leave some echo or trace that can be contemplated at the present moment. As it turns out, both Reid and Hume rejected this view of memory. They did so for different reasons, and they offered different alternatives to it.

For Reid, a memory is not a presently existing echo or trace of a past object, but a presently existing act of conception and belief. The act of conception and belief refers directly to the past object even though it no longer exists. Reid thought that introspection supports this account. He maintained that when I remember a rose I smelled yesterday, I find myself to be remembering the scent I experienced yesterday. I do not find myself to be now reproducing a less vivacious experience of the scent I smelled yesterday.

In contrast to Reid, Hume did think that to remember the scent of a rose is to reproduce a less vivacious experience of that scent. But the reproduction is not necessarily one that exists now, at the present moment. It is one that has a place in a sequence of ideas that either begins or terminates with impressions, and that is distant from those impressions, and hence from the present (or what was the present when the sequence started) in proportion to the number of intervening ideas in the sequence. Remembering, for Hume is in effect a computational process, one that itself takes time to occur and that involves the production of a sequence of ideas over time. Each member of the sequence is present at some moment, but the entire sequence takes more than a moment to occur.

Hume could also appeal to introspection to justify his position. He could maintain that while I can remember the smell of a rose and attach the term, “yesterday” to it, this is a derivative sort of memory that presupposes an understanding of these terms that can only be gained from original acts of locating an idea within a sequence of other ideas and impressions. I only remember that I smelled the rose yesterday as opposed to this morning or the day before insofar as I run through a specific chain of intermediate events, or associate the event of smelling the rose with other events that can be located in such a chain. Further assessment of the relative merits of Reid’s and Hume’s accounts is more than can be undertaken here.

Both Hume and Reid broke with the view that to remember is to contemplate a presently existing echo or leftover trace of a past object, though each did so in his own way — Reid by denying that the object of contemplation exists at the present moment, Hume by maintaining that the idea has a place in a temporally extended performance.

Reid defended his position by appealing, on the one hand to introspection and on the other to the absurdity of Hume’s position, which he mistook for the presentist view that to remember is just to contemplate a presently existing echo or trace. I have argued that Reid’s attempts to show that Hume’s position is absurd fail because of this mistake. When the roles played by the position that an idea has in a sequence, and by feelings of transition accompanying various sorts of transition are taken into account, Hume’s account of memory is not as patently absurd as Reid thought.

¹ For further recent work on this topic see René van Woudenberg, “Reid on memory and the identity of persons” in *The Cambridge companion to Thomas Reid*, Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Jeffrey McDonough, “Hume’s account of memory,” *British journal for the history of philosophy* 10 (2002): 71-87. I am also indebted to Rebecca Copenhaver for allowing me to see her work in progress on Reid’s account of memory.

² I adopt the following short form for references:

Enquiry – David Hume, *An enquiry concerning human understanding*, Tom L. Beauchamp, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). [Section].[paragraph].

Inquiry – Thomas Reid, *An inquiry into the human mind*, Derek R. Brookes, ed. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). [Chapter].[section]: [page]/[line].

Intellectual Powers – Thomas Reid, *Essays on the intellectual powers of man*, Derek R. Brookes, ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998). [Essay].[chapter]: [page]/[line].

Treatise – David Hume, *A treatise of human nature*, David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). [Book].[part].[section].[paragraph].