Perceptual and Imaginative Conception: The Distinction Reid Missed[1]

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1 Introduction

Conception has a prominent role to play in Thomas Reid's philosophy of mind, as is apparent from his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (*EIP* henceforth).[2] The present investigation concerns Reid's explanation of how objects (be they real or nonexistent) are conceived. According to him, conception functions in two different ways: it is either an ingredient in another act of thinking, such as perception or memory, or it is exercised by itself, sometimes about objects that do not (and will never) exist. Fictional objects can be remembered, but to do so the mind needs an initial, independent grip on them, which can only be achieved by an exercise of "bare conception".[3]

This paper shows that there is a deep-rooted tension in Reid's understanding of conception: although the type of conception employed in perception is closely related to the one employed in imagination, three fundamental features distinguish *perceptual conception* (as the former will be referred to throughout this paper) from *imaginative conception* (as the latter will be called henceforth).[4] These features would have been ascribed by Reid himself to conception as involved in perception, but not to conception as involved in imagination. He should have recognized them as marking the former as a different kind from the latter, and he should not have hastily lumped perceptual and imaginative conceptions together. [5] As we shall see, some of the things that Reid says show him to be at best undecided, and at worst, inconsistent. A fair portion of this paper is dedicated to showing that, by giving up some of the claims Reid makes, primarily his idea that the conception involved in perception is identical with conception involved in imagination, the more important and forward-thinking aspects of his project can be salvaged. To do

this, let us first see what are the dimensions along which this distinction should be drawn.

The first and most important distinguishing trait concerns the fact that perceptual conception of bodies does not essentially proceed by way of concepts. A child who does not possess the concept "red" will be able to perceive a certain red object as it is, namely red. If perceptual conception were propositional and if it were, as Reid thinks, an essential ingredient in any perceptual experience, the child would not be able to perceive the red object accurately, unless he had the concept "red" in his conceptual repertoire. Later in the paper, a more detailed explanation will show why considerations like this weigh in favor of thinking that perceptual conception is non-conceptual or non-propositional. What has been said so far, however, should be enough to make apparent the contrast with imaginative conception. According to Reid, to imagine something one must combine different attributes with which one was previously acquainted. To be able to do so, one must think of a specific color, a specific size, shape, etc., put together in a certain way. This would not be possible if the imaginer did not possess the respective concepts. In this sense, imaginative conception is conceptual or propositional.

Second, the substances of which we have a relative notion in perception are complete objects. By contrast, most of the objects of imagination are incomplete. This is a consequence of how these objects are "given" to us: the power of imagination combines several qualities together, but there is no requirement that in doing so imagination will completely specify all the qualities has by such an object. For instance, very rarely an imaginer will wonder what is the color of the stomach of a particular imagined centaur. If one does so wonder, one can imagine it being a vivid shade of purple, if one so decides. However, whether to undergo such an act of imagination or not is entirely open to that imaginer. This issue is not already settled, as it is in the case of a particular existing horse. The point here is that perception is always about complete objects, while imagination is about, at most, completable, but incomplete objects. The nature of the objects conceived on a given occasion makes a difference for what type of conception one employs.

Third, perceptual conception *makes salient* properties from the substance to which those qualities belong, whereas imaginative conception *bestows* properties on the imagined incomplete object.

The starting point for establishing the fundamental distinction between perceptual and imaginative conception is Reid's characterization of perception in *EIP*. The next section will explain how conception functions, when it is an ingredient in perception. A good way of understanding perceptual conception is to liken it to the relation of 'having in mind', discussed in Donnellan (1997). This explanation provides a richer context for developing the other two distinguishing features of perceptual conception.

Section §3 discusses Essay IV of *EIP*, where Reid characterizes the power of conception and imagination. The explanation of how imaginative conception operates is based on the following model: the mind starts by considering a certain set of properties and then orients itself towards an object that is supposed to uniquely correspond to that set. In the course of defending this thesis, the contrast between the two kinds of conception will fully emerge: while perceptual conception makes salient some of the properties had by the complete perceived object, imaginative conception works by 'creating' an imagined incomplete object.

2 Perceptual Conception

According to Reid, when one conceives a material substance, as part of a perceptual experience, one does not classify or subsume that body under concepts. He argues that conception proper is not propositional, and that it implies no judgment about what is conceived:

> Thus we see that the words *conceive, imagine, apprehend* have two meanings, and are used to express two operations of the mind, which ought never to be confounded. Sometimes they express simple apprehension, which implies no judgment at all; sometimes they express judgment or opinion. [...] "I conceive an Egyptian pyramid." This implies no judgment. [...] the thing conceived [the Egyptian pyramid] may be no proposition, but a simple term only, as a pyramid, an obelisk (*EIP*, I. 1, p. 25).

The interpretation offered here takes this idea one step further: not only is conception proper not propositional, in the sense that it does not affirm or deny anything of the object conceived, but, when employed in perception, it is not even conceptual. A mental counterpart of the term "Egyptian pyramid" is not necessary in order for someone to perceive such a pyramid, when in its presence. One might possess such a concept, and one might use it when one sees a pyramid, but perception may occur in its absence. In other words, propositional concept-attribution may be deployed alongside perception, but this is neither necessary for perception, nor is it the result of the way the material substance is conceived. Rather, the concepts deployed in perception may belong to other operations of our minds (e.g. judging), occurring at the same time as perceptual conception. Reid's writings support this idea by indicating that perception (much like other operations of the mind) never occurs in isolation and that we must pay special attention to distinguish what is specific to perception from other faculties. The following two passages back up this interpretation:

> Most of the operations of the mind, that have names in common language, are complex in their nature, and made up of various ingredients, or more simple acts; which, though conjoined in our constitution, must be disjoined by abstraction, in order to our having a distinct and scientific notion of the complex operation (*EIP*, I. 1, p. 37).
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> This observation is made here only, that we may not confound the operations of different powers of the mind, which, by being always conjoined after we grow up to understanding, are apt to pass for one and the same (*EIP*, II. 5, p. 97).

Section §2.1 starts with a discussion of some of the secondary literature on Reidian perception, where the consensus seems to be that perception of bodies does take place, but that the conception associated with perception of bodies is necessarily conceptual. An objection to this view will be raised and an alternative interpretation will be offered, arguing that, given some cases that Reid himself discusses, Reidian perceptual conception of bodies must be non-conceptual. This discussion leaves out perception of qualities, which has its own special

conditions, different from those necessary for the perception of bodies. In §2.2, the other two features distinguishing perceptual from imaginative conception are discussed in order to emphasize why Reid should be understood as saying that substances are complete objects and that perceptual conception works in making qualities of substances salient to the mind.

2.1 The Non-conceptual Character of Perceptual Conception

In perception, we learn that the world is populated with objects and also what kind of objects they are.[6] There are two sides to any perceptual experience: one 'physical'; the other one 'mental.' The former is determined by the impression that the object perceived makes on the perceiver's organs of sense, the nerves and the brain. The latter relates to the operation and the content of perception, understood as a faculty of our mind.

Concerning the physical side, no perceptual experience can occur in the absence of an impression made by the object on a certain organ of sense (*EIP*, II. 2, p. 74.) These impressions correspond "exactly to the nature and conditions of the objects by which they are made," whereas our sensations and perceptions correspond only in a varying degree to these impressions (*EIP*, II. 2, p. 76). This gives us a first characterization of perception: it is not only direct, but also, for lack of a better term, 'objectively' perspectival. Our perception depends on the "medium which passes between the object and the organ" (*EIP*, II. 2, p. 74.) This medium is also responsible for making our perception more or less distinct. A perceptual experience always gives us information about an object perceived under certain conditions, which, in the case of visual perception, include, but are not restricted to: light, distance, position. These conditions constitute the aforementioned perspective: it matters for how somebody perceives a chair whether he seew it in broad daylight or at dusk, or whether he sees it from three feet or from ten:

> The objects in this room will be seen by a person in the room less and less distinctly as the light of the day fails; they pass through all the various degrees of distinctness according to the degrees of the light, and at last, in total darkness, they are not seen at all (*EIP*, II. 5, p. 97).

The way this objective perspective contributes to how something is perceived is significant for the distinction between perceptual and imaginative conception. Perceptual conception is always of the object as it is presented there and then to the perceiver. By contrast, imaginative conception has more to do with how the conceiver puts together certain qualities the object conceived is thought to have. The imaginer, as opposed to the perceiver, is entirely responsible for supplying a given 'subjective' perspective, from which the object is imagined.

Reid characterizes the mental side of perception as having the following key ingredients: a conception of the object perceived and an irresistible and immediate belief of its existence (*EIP*, II. 5, p. 96).[7] Perceptual conception presents the object to the perceiver, while the belief allows the perceiver to assert that the object exists. To see how everything works together, let us take as an example an instance of visual perception (this is just for heuristic purposes; an instance of any type of perception, in any of the perceptual sense-modalities, would work just as well). Suppose that someone sees a chair. This means, first, that the chair in question must exist. Second, a certain impression on the perceiver's organ(s) of sight must be present. Third, this impression must give rise to a visual sensation, which prompts the perceiver to perceptually conceive of the object and believe in its (present) existence, in the place and in the position it is perceived to be.

To paint a complete picture of how perception works, we must understand what it is that we perceive when we see, for instance, a chair. The most straightforward reading of the passage in which Reid gives his official characterization of perception (*EIP* II. 5, p. 96) indicates that when we see a chair, we perceive the chair, and not just some of its qualities. A perceiver sees the chair with its qualities, but he does not see qualities and then infer that they belong to a certain solid object, used for sitting. However, this reading is in tension with several other passages from *EIP*. When Reid talks about the objects of perception proper, he argues that they "are the various qualities of bodies" (*EIP* II. 17, p. 200). Previously, at the opening of the *EIP*, he argued that the following is one of the principles taken for granted:

> All the things which we immediately perceive by our senses, and all the things we are conscious of, are things which must be in something else as their subject. Thus by my

> senses, I perceive figure, colour, hardness, softness, motion, resistance, and such like things. But these are qualities and must necessarily be in something that is figured, coloured, hard or soft, that moves, or resists. It is not to these qualities, but to that which is the subject of them, that we give the name of body (*EIP* I. 2, p. 43).

The straightforward interpretation of these two passages is that material substances are not immediately (in the sense of 'directly') perceived; only primary qualities have this privilege, according to Reid (*EIP* II. 17, p. 202.) The notion one forms of both secondary qualities and bodies is relative (e. g. *EIP* II. 17, p. 203, and *EIP* II. 19, p. 219). However, one must not think that Reid believes that we know that there exists a substance because we infer that the qualities perceived are bundled together in a certain body. The belief in the existence of the material substance must be non-inferential if we are to count as perceiving it. The perception of material substances must be, in a certain sense immediate, namely non-inferential.[8]

There are other options here, however: first, Reid may be interpreted as saying that both substances and qualities are perceived, but that perception of qualities is not necessary for the perception of bodies. In this case, the type of conception associated with perception of bodies is not necessarily conceptual. It is not conceptual, in the sense that the body under consideration is not conceived just as the sum total of the qualities it has. To put it differently, it is not the case that a perceiver thinks about the body perceived as whatever it is that simultaneously instantiates the perceived color, shape, size, etc. If this were the case, the content of that perception would be given by a complex definite description denoting the body in question; this cannot be done without deploying concepts. Moreover, as it will be shown later on, if the perceiver is mistaken regarding one quality, then the body in question is not actually perceived. On the current interpretation, however, the body can be perceptually conceived and hence perceived, even without correctly perceiving and hence conceiving all of its qualities.

Second, one can argue that both qualities and the objects they belong to are perceived, but that perception of the latter cannot happen without the perception of the former. On this view, perceptual conception of bodies involves concept-attribution and is propositional.

The former interpretation is the one developed throughout this paper: whenever an object makes an impression on our organs of sense, we have a sensation that leads to the formation of conceptions of the qualities had by that object and also a conception of the body having those qualities. The conception of the body in question is non-propositional and the belief that the body exists is non-inferential. This interpretation leaves open the possibility that perceptual conception of qualities is conceptual, in the following sense. Unless one is in a position to deploy concepts of specific colors, sizes, etc, one is not in a position to perceptually conceive and hence perceive the respective qualities. This issue is the topic of another paper and it will not be further addressed here.

Vere Chappell (1989), Gideon Yaffe & Ryan Nichols (2009), and Roger Gallie (1997) favor different versions of the latter interpretation.

Chappell argues that for hardness to be perceived, an impression of hardness must be made on the organs of sense and that, in turn, gives rise to a certain sensation. Such a sensation would "suggest the quality of hardness [to the perceiver], that is, prompt him both to conceive of this quality and believe that it exists in the hard body that first started the perceptual process, which conception and belief [would] constitute his perception of that quality"(Chappell (1989, p. 59)). According to him, we perceive qualities that we believe to exist in the world and we also believe that they belong to certain bodies. On this interpretation, it is unclear by what process someone starts with the perception of the quality of hardness and ends up with the belief that the quality exists in the hard *body*. It is possible that Chappell thinks that this missing step is supplied by an inference. Someone perceives a quality; qualities cannot exist by themselves; hence there is an object which is such-and-such (in this case, a hard body) that is perceived. According to Chappell, the conception of body one forms in perception is necessarily connected with the quality perceived and, as such, necessarily attributive. One is thus unable to conceive the body in the absence of a mode of conception: in the example that he gives, one necessarily conceives of the body *as* a hard substance, by first conceiving the quality of hardness. If this process is inferential, and it seems to be, it cannot count as perception for Reid.[9]

Yaffe & Nichols (2009, n. pg.) argue that "to conceive of an object is to be aware of that object as the bearer of some particular property. [...] To perceive an object is to be aware of it in a particular way, as the possessor of a particular quality, *and*, at the same time, to be convinced that the object exists and is as you conceive it to be." This passage indicates that, in order to perceive a body, one must perceive the property the object is understood to possess. Otherwise, one would not be able to be perceptually aware of an object *as* the bearer of that property. If the property in question is not perceived, but just thought to be perceived (or plainly misperceived), the perception of the material substance is in question, since the only way of being perceptually aware of the object is by correctly attributing a property to that object. One consequence of Yaffe & Nichols's interpretation is that perception of objects, namely bodies, is conditionally dependent on perception of their qualities. The tight connection they allege to exist between the conception of an object and the perception of a property had by that object rules out the possibility of illusions, in which the property in question is misperceived, but the object itself is actually perceived. The following passage shows that Reid's theory allows for such cases, thus Yaffe & Nichols's interpretation is problematic:

> ...in perception, the notion which our senses give of the object may be more or less clear, more or less distinct, in all possible degrees. Thus we see more distinctly an object at a small than at a great distance. An object at a great distance is seen more distinctly in a clear than in a foggy day (*EIP* II. 5, p. 96).

Consider this: sometimes someone perceives an object, but he is mistaken with regards to what properties that object has. In fact, he is mistaken even with regards to what kind of object it is; all he knows is that there is an object there, and that object causes him to see a certain shape, color, size, etc. To make the problem more vivid, let us take an example, adapted from Donnellan (1997, p. 372-73). Suppose that on a sunny afternoon, a group of friends goes for a walk in the park. In the distance, one of them sees a man carrying an umbrella and says to the others: "How funny: that man carries an umbrella! He is probably a tourist; it never rains in LA, in the summer." To this, one of the others replies: "What man with an umbrella? That is just a rock

you're seeing, though it looks like a man carrying an umbrella." The object of perception was the rock, although the first perceiver took it to be a man with an umbrella. The question is: how did the perceiver conceive of the rock? On Yaffe & Nichols's interpretation, it follows that the perceiver conceived of the rock as the bearer of the shape, color and size of a man with an umbrella. But if this is true, it is unclear in what sense the perceiver can truthfully be said to have been perceptually conceiving of the rock itself. Rocks have rock-properties, not man-with-an-umbrella-properties. If the only way the perceiver was aware of that rock is as bearer of some properties (e.g. man-with-an-umbrella-properties), as Yaffe & Nichols suggest, he cannot be said to have had any *de re* thoughts about the rock itself, since rocks do not have man-with-an-umbrella-properties.

One could argue that, since a man with an umbrella and the rock in question have common shape properties, the perceiver conceived of the rock as a presently existing thing with a certain shape. So the argument above would show at most that rock-properties can be incorrectly ascribed, but not shape-properties. However, a similar argument applies to shape. To see how this works, think about a shape-illusion, for instance the Hering illusion, in which two straight lines appear to be curved. What this illusion (and others like it) shows is that the object in question is perceived, even when the perceiver is wrong about its shape. In this particular case, the straight shape of the lines is misperceived, but the lines themselves are perceived. In this sense, it is accurate to say that one had a *de re* perception of the two lines, while being wrong about their shape.

Reid would describe situations like these by arguing that the rock (or the straight line) was the object of perception, even though some of its qualities were misperceived. However, Yaffe & Nichols describe this situation differently: the perceiver misperceived the object itself, because he misconceived it as the bearer of nonexistent properties, and there was no other way of conceiving that object, in that situation. But illusions, understood as perceptions of objects whose properties are misperceived, do happen and Reid has a way of explaining why such anomalies occur.[10]

What Reid argues that happens with animals and young children when they perceive also

counts against Yaffe & Nichols's interpretation. Contrary to their claim that perceptual awareness of an object is dependent on our correct attribution of a property to that object, Reid argues that animals and infants do perceive, but they do not have the intellectual abilities to distinguish between qualities and objects (*EIP* II. 19, p. 219, lines 18–25). Rather, they perceive these things jumbled together. One way to interpret this is to think that one can perceive an object, without relying on its properties, because sometimes no distinction between objects and properties is actually made.

The interpretation in Gallie (1997) is similar to that of Yaffe & Nichols's, but he takes it one step further: he argues that conception in general, thus including perceptual conception, requires one to have an ability for linguistic representation. He thinks that perceptual conception cannot function in the absence of one's prior grasp of concepts, and of words used to express those concepts. Therefore, perception itself cannot properly function without the perceiver having such a prior grasp and use of concepts. In reply to this interpretation, Reid would point out that animals and young children are quite capable of perceiving the outside world. It is not our superior perceptual abilities that distinguish us from animals, but our powers to process the information we are fed by our senses: "brute animals, *who have the same senses that we have*, cannot separate the different qualities belonging to the same subject, and have only a complex and confused notion of the whole" (*EIP* IV. 3, p. 327). What animals lack is our power of abstraction and analysis. Moreover, while it is true that one can have a more or less accurate notion of the objects around oneself, Reid nonetheless argues that such a notion is not formed in perception: "The child has all the notion of it [a jack for roasting meat] which sight gives; whatever there is more in the notion which the man forms of it, must be derived from other powers of the mind" (*EIP* II. 5, p. 97). Gallie (1997, p. 321) unnecessarily over-intellectualizes a process thought by Reid to be basic, and shared by us with infants and animals with no linguistic abilities.

Furthermore, one may perceptually conceive of things, as one often does in perception, that are not always communicable through language. For instance, in perceiving a red body, one

thereby conceives that particular shade of red. But, if asked what shade of red that is, the perceiver may be at a complete loss. Since our perceiver cannot verbalize what particular shade of red he perceived and hence perceptually conceived, Gallie would have to say that no perception actually took place. In support of Gallie, one might argue that our perceiver perceived a red thing, since he is able to say that he is seeing a red body, even though he does not know what particular shade of red that is. To make the problem more apparent, then, think about a color that does not yet have a name (or whose name is not known by a certain perceiver). A perceiver would not be able to deploy a linguistic representation of that color, and, on Gallie's interpretation, someone like that would not actually be in a position to perceive that color. This is an unwanted consequence. Moreover, Gallie did not provide enough textual evidence to show that this is Reid's view. If we attend to such evidence, passages like the ones quoted above support a different interpretation: animals and human beings perceive even before being able to exercise any linguistic abilities.

Therefore, according to Reid, and contrary to the interpretations discussed so far, we have a way of perceiving an object, and hence conceiving it, without necessarily perceiving its qualities, and without necessarily thinking about that object under a certain concept – e.g. "hard body", or "red ball", etc. Perhaps perceiving a body's quality of being a thing or a presently existing thing might be required, but these types of qualities are not relevant here, since they are common to all perceived substances and would not be enough to distinguish between one body and another. This result should make the issue concerning the conceptual or non-conceptual character of perceptual conception easier to address and develop.

The previous discussion brings us to the crux of the problem: just what is this perceptual conception of material substances? Reid's first attempt to explicate conception is in Essay I, where he defines some of the main terms of the book. "[T]o *conceive*, to *imagine*, to *apprehend* [...] signify an act of the mind which implies no belief or judgment at all" (*EIP* I. 1, p. 24). Thus to conceive means to apprehend something, to entertain a thought, a belief, a sensation. To perceive a material substance, however, something else is needed: one must also believe that

what one presently conceives also exists. Such a belief cannot be formed unless that object is conceived by the perceiver, on a given occasion. The conception had by a perceiver may be clear or obscure; either way, a conception of the object is necessary for the formation of the existential belief. Conception is more primitive than belief – there can be no belief without conception, whereas there can be conception of an object without belief in its existence (*EIP*, II. 20, p. 228). According to Reid, the faculty of conception is a basic operation of the mind; it always has an object, although sometimes its object may not exist. As it will become apparent from section §3, the type of conception employed about nonexisting objects is importantly different from the type used to think about existing ones.

In perception, we conceive of real and existing objects, along with some of their qualities. Our conception of an object, formed in perception, ranges between clear and obscure, many times depending on external circumstances. The same can be said about our knowledge of an object: it too comes in degrees. The conception of an object had in perception is distinct from the notion of that object, had by understanding what qualities the object has and how they fit together. A carpenter knows a lot more about chairs than a layperson does just by looking at the chair in front of him. The impression made by the body in front of him on his visual organs leads to his conceiving of the chair, but not necessarily *as* a chair, i.e. as an object used for sitting. In order for perceptual conception to be propositional, it should be necessary for a perceiver to conceive of the qualities of the chair *as* qualities of such an object and conceive of the chair itself *as* an object used to sit on. Moreover, such a perceiver would be required to have concepts denoting all these qualities and the object itself (as a chair), for this type of conception to be conceptual. Whereas, Reid thinks that one can perceptually conceive a chair, in a different way, i.e. non-descriptively and non-propositionally:

> Thus the notion which a child has of a jack for roasting meat, will be acknowledged to be very different from that of a man who understands its construction, and perceives the relation of the parts to one another, and to the whole. The child sees the jack and every part of it as well as the man: *The child, therefore, has all the notion of it which*

> *sight gives*; whatever there is more in the notion which the man forms of it, must be derived from other powers of the mind, which may afterwards be explained (*EIP* II. 5, p. 97). [Emphasis added.]

This passage supports the interpretation found in William Alston (1989, p. 43): perceptual conception of material substances is not about the use of 'general concepts,' and it can actually operate in their absence. The powers of classification can be used, but they are not necessary for perception. And if they are used, the information they provide must be distinguished from the information provided by perception proper. This lesson is drawn from Reid's claim that the notion the child has by sight of that object is identical to the one the man has by sight of the same object. Reid contrasts the conception of an object one has in perception with the more sophisticated notion of the same object, at which one may arrive after careful contemplation and after employing several other faculties (e. g. abstraction and generalization). Alston is right in arguing that conception is not about subsuming an object under a concept and thinking about it as being of a certain kind. The passage just quoted adduces important evidence in favor of the idea that perceptual conception of substances is not propositional. Just to perceive, one does not need to have and use general concepts. If such concepts are however available, one will probably use them and have a richer type of experience. Reid's suggestion is that this type of experience is a compounded one, with perception being just one of its components, together with abstraction and generalization bringing in general concepts.[11]

James Van Cleve (2004) presents another argument against the idea that perceptual conception of bodies is conceptual: if the conception involved in perception were conceptual (i.e. formed with concepts and impossible in their absence), it would already be present in the belief of the existence of the object perceived. In such a case, "[f]orming a conception of an object would be entertaining some proposition about it and the belief component of perception would consist in affirming that proposition" (Van Cleve (2004, p. 107).) But then, one would need to have and be able to use a whole array of concepts when one perceives that a chair is in front of oneself. This would be inconsistent with Reid's idea that infants and all kinds of animals can

perceive objects, together with their qualities.

Let us make things more explicit. Van Cleve (2004, p. 108) proposes to understand perceptual conception as a kind of Russellian acquaintance, since "it is not constituted by conceptualization or judgment." Van Cleve does not construe conception as the full-blown Russellian version of acquaintance, since that would make it impossible for Reid to argue that we perceive external objects.[12] Accordingly, perceptual conception should be understood as the awareness of an object one has while perceiving that object. Contrary to Russellian acquaintance, Reidian perceptual conception is not supposed to give one full knowledge of the thing perceived. Examples like the one where someone perceives the rock and thinks it is something else would not be possible: on Russell's view, if the perceiver is actually acquainted with the rock, he cannot think instead that he is perceptually acquainted with a man with an umbrella. Whereas, on Reid's view, this situation is entirely plausible. To gain a better grip on this notion of perceptual conception, Donnellan's relation of 'having in mind' might be better suited here. Donnellan, unlike Russell, does not presuppose that the 'having in mind' relation gives one knowledge about the respective object. Thus, someone will be said to have the rock in mind, in the situation under consideration, even though he incorrectly ascribes man-with-an-umbrella properties to it. Reid's terminology suggests that this is a better approximation: he uses 'apprehension' to indicate that to conceive something often just means to entertain a thought about that thing, without judging that thought to be true or false.[13]

For this to happen, perceptual conception must be understood as having a non-conceptual character, in the sense that its content is not given by a (propositional) description-like entity. Perceptual conception of bodies is best understood as direct awareness of the objects perceived. One may raise an objection here: to be able to perceptually conceive substances, one must have at least very general concepts, like "body", "solidity", etc., otherwise one would not be able to individuate a body and distinguish it from others. So, perceptual conception cannot be non-conceptual, in the way discussed so far. There are several things one could say in reply to such an objection. First, it should not be too difficult to perceive where a body ends and another one

begins: no two bodies occupy the same space and this can be apparent, in the absence of any concepts of body. Different sense-modalities which are employed for acknowledging the presence of material substances in one's environment may help distinguish among different bodies. For instance, if someone touches something with his left hand while also seeing something to his right (while he has his head turned to the right), that person should be able to notice that he is dealing with two different things. This should be so, even when that person is not able to conceptualize what kind of things the two objects are.

Second, even if the same sense-modality is employed, one should still be able to acknowledge the presence of two bodies, even though no concept of body or solidity, is present to his mind of the perceiver. For instance, if one touches something with a hand while also eating something (and thus touching it with his tongue) one should be able to register the difference between the two things, even though one would not be able to descriptively characterize the two objects.

For all these reasons, perceptual conception of bodies should be understood to be non-conceptual.

2.2 Perceptual Conception Selects Properties from Complete Objects

Existing substances are complete objects, in the sense that for some given quality Q, that quality is (or is not) a constituent of a particular substance that one perceptually conceives on a given occasion. The fact that that quality is (or is not) a constituent of the object is independent of somebody's perceptually conceiving it. Reid does not speak of substances as being complete objects, in this sense. However, he argues that all contingent objects cannot be known by normal, limited minds, but only by the mind of their creator (*EIP*, VII. 1, p. 545). There is more in a substance than meets the eye. The fact that these are created objects suggests that once created, no other constitutive qualities are going to be added to them; moreover, each created material substance is a unique individual. Reid takes this claim of individuality very seriously, arguing that even the qualities belonging to these substances are individuals, since only individuals are

things that exist; universals are nonexistent, in his view. The following passage supports this interpretation:

> To this I answer, that the whiteness of this sheet is one thing, whiteness is another; the conceptions signified by these two forms of speech are as different as the expressions: The first signifies *an individual quality really existing*, and it is not a general conception, though it be an abstract one: the second signifies a general conception, which implies no existence, but may be predicated of every thing that is white, and in the same sense. On this account, if one should say that the whiteness of this sheet is the whiteness of another sheet, every man perceives this to be absurd; but when he says both sheets are white, this is true and perfectly understood (*EIP* V. 3, p. 367). [Emphasis added].

The individuality of the qualities does not have a marked role to play in how we understand the notion of completeness attributed here to Reid; its importance resides in the fact that it helps distinguish between one object and the next.

To better understand the idea that substances are complete objects, let us think about them as supporting complete constellations of qualities. We do not have perceptual (or other type of) access to all the qualities that make up a complete set; however, we can conceive of qualities that are not given to us in perception. But it is important to understand that perceptual conception of substances only enables us access to a limited subset of qualities. This is reminiscent of Locke's distinction between nominal and real essences (*Essay*, III. iii-v), with the caveat that Reid, in contrast to Locke, thinks that individuals have essences from which all their qualities flow.[14] The real essence is immutable, complete, and not discoverable by mere mortals; so, instead, we make do with attributing nominal essences to individual substances. The latter type of essences are neither immutable nor complete: they can be changed by either introducing or subtracting qualities from the designated set (or by subtracting qualities from the respective set.)

Part of the set that makes up the nominal essence of a substance is constituted by qualities that are made available to us by the perceptual conception of the substance in question. When we

perceive a particular horse, for instance, what we perceive is a complete object, since a horse is a created individual material substance. However, the perceptual conception that is an ingredient of somebody's perception will not present to his mind every quality had by the respective horse. It will not even present every *perceivable* quality had by that horse. For instance, the horse under consideration might have a tail that is 40 cm long, and a perceiver will certainly perceptually conceive the horse as having a tail; but he will not conceive that tail *as* being 40 cm long. His perceptual conception is not fitted to discriminate such details. But, arguably, the length of the horse's tail is a perceivable quality of that horse. It may thus be said that perceptual conception selects, in the sense that it makes salient some properties of the substance perceived and only those are presented to the perceiver. Although any constellation of qualities inherent in a substance is complete, whenever someone perceives the substance, he only perceptually conceives a subset of those qualities. One would need to have perceptual access to the real essence of things, in order to be in principle able to perceptually conceive all of their qualities. Even then, it is doubtful that perceptual conception can present one with all the qualities of a certain substance: one must not forget that perception is perspectival. It would be thus counterintuitive to argue that one can perceive and hence perceptually conceive the tail of a horse, if one just has a frontal view of the respective horse. Perceptual conception of a substance is quite selective concerning what properties (if any) it makes salient to the perceiver's mind. Both this trait and the fact that the objects of perception are complete are not shared by imaginative conception.

3 Imaginative Conception

The structure of imagination is analogous to that of perception, with some qualifications: a perceptual experience is evoked by a sensation of the external object and involves a type of conception and a belief that the object conceived exists; an imaginative experience is not evoked by sensation and it only involves a type of conception, and no belief concerning the existence of the object conceived. Although structurally the two faculties are quite similar, this section shows

that imaginative conception is different from the perceptual kind. Whereas the latter is non-conceptual, the former is fully conceptual, i.e. propositional. In a way, more thinking power is needed for someone to imagine a centaur than just to see a horse. Furthermore, whereas perceptual conception makes salient some of the properties of complete objects, imaginative conception "bestows" on the imagined objects the qualities they are imagined to have. Imagining a nonexistent object logically entails the ascription of certain known (and conceptualized) qualities to that object. Section §3.1 develops the claim that imaginative conception is conceptual, while section §3.2 explains how an imaginer constructs incomplete imagined objects, out of a pre-determined set of qualities.

3.1 The Conceptual Character of Imaginative Conception

Reid dedicates a whole essay to what he calls "conception", but the issues he addresses there are different from the ones raised by perceptual conception. Some of the things he says in Essay IV do not apply equally well to perceptual conception and this indicates that what he calls "bare conception" is interestingly different. The distinction between perceptual and imaginative conception to which this paper draws attention is best supported by Essay IV.

Regardless of whether one finds it compelling and helpful to assimilate perceptual conception to Russellian acquaintance, according to Reid (*EIP*, IV. 1, p. 308-309), the type of conception employed by imagination is analogous to the type of knowledge one can have by description, as Russell (1910) suggested. In order to be able to imagine a winged horse, one must either be acquainted with such an animal, or have the concepts denoting the bits and pieces that would make up such an animal and a way of putting them together, such that the result would be a winged horse. Minimally speaking, an imaginer of a winged horse would need to know what wings are, what horses are and be able to form a conception of how wings could be attached to a horse. Since winged horses do not exist, our imaginer cannot be acquainted with such a beast. Imaginative conception is active in a sense in which perception is not, namely it must "construct" its objects; hence one must have a prior grasp of the components from which those objects are

constructed. In order to be able to imagine a certain new (not previously heard) sound, an imaginer would need to be able to imagine both the pitch and the tone of that sound. Without having any concepts denoting the two different characteristics of the sound, such an imaginer would be in no position to carry out his act of imagination. One must be able to identify each component in such a way that it can be attributed to an imagined object; an imaginer must have something like a concept denoting the components used to construct the imagined object.

A congenitally blind person cannot conceive colors (either perceptually or imaginatively), Reid argues, because such a person cannot be acquainted with color. But something more than just perceptual acquaintance is required for imagination. One must not forget that Reid thinks that imagination is a certain type of bare, or simple conception (*EIP*, IV. 1, p. 306). And conceiving an object, be that object an actual object of sense, and not just a mythological creature, in the absence of any other operation of the mind of which conception might be an ingredient, does not just happen out of the blue, because "conception of objects is not the first act of the mind about them. External objects are perceived by our senses before they are simply conceived."[15] Moreover, "we must have judged or reasoned before we have the conception or simple apprehension of judgment, or of reasoning" (*EIP*, IV. 3, p. 327).

According to Reid then, one must not only be acquainted with the bits and pieces of what one (imaginatively) conceives, but also be able to separate the conception-component of perception (or consciousness, or belief / judgment), and reflect on it. This analysis alters the nature of conception itself: the simple conception is different from the conception-component employed in perception. What in perception was non-conceptual becomes fully conceptualized when what Reid calls "conception" (and hence imagination) is exercised by itself. We should not be mislead by his use of a single term, namely "conception", to refer to both an ingredient of all the other operations of our mind, and to a faculty that can simply present an object to the mind, without expressing any judgment about it. The process of acquiring a perceptual conception is different from that of having a simple conception, including an imaginative one. Whereas perceptual conception just happens in perception because we are constituted in a certain way, so that our

sensations suggest such conceptions, "simple conceptions are got by analyzing more complex operations" (*EIP* IV. 3, p. 327). So, simple conceptions, and hence imaginative conceptions, are different from perceptual conceptions: to be able to use this type of conception, someone must have a fully conceptualized understanding of the object conceived.

Although imaginative conception is derived from perceptual conception, the former can still be different from the latter; this derivation simply means that someone cannot have a purely imaginative conception of a yellow winged-horse, unless one was previously acquainted, in perception, with yellow, wings and horses. This does not contradict the thesis that perceptual conception is non-conceptual: once we analyze the information we have in perception, we can form concepts about all sorts of things and only when we have those concepts can we employ imaginative conception, in the way envisaged by Reid. The fact that we are supposed to know every little detail which we use when we imagine a mythical creature shows that imaginative conception is conceptual. It is quite counterintuitive to claim that we are going to imagine a certain centaur without construing that object under the concept "man-horse," or something similar. The first difference in character between the two types of conception should be by now apparent.

3.2 Imaginative Conception "Bestows" Qualities on Incomplete Objects

Although imaginative conception of nonexistent objects must start from known ingredients, the way of combining those ingredients is entirely up to the imaginer. We can imaginatively conceive things that do not exist, as clearly and distinctly as we can perceptually conceive things that do exist. However, it is we who arrange the parts and combine the attributes, in the case of imagined nonexistents. By contrast, nature is responsible for how things are in the real world, and, according to Reid, we cannot know entirely what powers of combination it used in putting together the objects that populate the world. It is different with the objects that are imagined by us, and known to have no existence. According to Reid, we may "form an endless variety of

combinations and compositions, which we call creatures of the imagination. These may be clearly conceived, though they never existed" (*EIP*, IV. 1, p. 310). The interesting question is: how can such nonexistent individuals be conceived?

By way of reply, let us look at how Terence Parsons (1980) argues that nonexistent objects are to be conceived, according to Meinong. One may worry that this is anachronistic: but the claim here is not that the whole Meinongian ontological system is supported by Reid's philosophy. But some of the things Reid does say indicate that he might have been of a Meinongian inclination.[16] This does not mean that Reid thought that there are three separate levels of existence: existence, subsistence, and nonexistence. Thinking of Reid as a Meinongian kindred spirit makes sense of his idea that when one imagines a centaur one does not form an *image* of a centaur in one's mind, but one conceives an animal, with a certain body, with internal life and motion, despite its obvious non-existence (*EIP* IV. 2, p. 321-22). By imagining a centaur, one understands what it would be like to be in perceptual contact with such an animal. This does not confer existence or subsistence to a nonexistent object; it just suggests how one can imagine a centaur, without necessarily bringing an image to one's mind.

According to Parsons, in a Meinongian framework, to each existing object there corresponds a unique non-empty set of properties. These are all the properties that the object has. By employing such a method one can include in one's ontology nonexisting, and even impossible objects. For example, the set {goldenness, mountainhood} is correlated with a golden mountain, which is an object. There are no real, existing golden mountains, so this object is nonexistent.[17] Imaginatively conceiving a centaur proceeds in the following way: an imaginer conceives a certain set of properties (including, but not limited to, being an animal that is half man and half horse) and thinks that a certain imaginary object corresponds to it. To emphasize, an imaginer will not be said to only have a certain set of properties in mind, but also a certain object, "constructed" out of those properties by his act of imagination. This set of properties is nothing more than a set constituted by attributes that Reid says are necessary for imagining things that have no existence.

If we look at what Reid claims to happen when one imagines a centaur, this suggestion takes a clearer shape: in imaginatively conceiving a centaur, an imaginer puts certain properties together in such a way that the result is a certain nonexistent animal with human head and torso, and with the body of a horse:

> This one object which I conceive, is not the image of an animal, it is an animal. I know what it is to conceive an image of an animal, and what it is to conceive an animal; and I can distinguish the one of these from the other [...]. The thing I conceive is a body of a certain figure and color, having life and spontaneous motion (*EIP*, IV.2, p. 321-22).

The mythical animal imagined in this way is a certain individual; one does not just imagine the property of centaurhood, in general, as Gallie (1997, p. 320) thought. Reid is explicit on this issue: one imaginatively conceives a body with certain specific attributes. Moreover, imagining a certain centaur is not problematic: one way this can be done is by combining in one's imagination certain individual attributes, with which the imaginer is acquainted via perception. For instance, someone might imagine a centaur by thinking that it has the body of his neighbor's horse and the torso of his neighbor. These bits of bodies do exist in reality and belong to individuals (and hence are themselves individuals). By combining two individuals in this manner, the resultant thing should be an individual itself – albeit a nonexistent one. This is not to say that the universal centaurhood cannot be conceived; it can, but someone conceiving it will not be said to *imagine* anything. Reid argues that universals cannot be imagined, since imagination is related to objects of sense, and universals are not objects of sense, but he thinks that they can be conceived, without being thought to exist or not.[18] According to Reid, imaginatively conceiving a centaur is not like conceiving a triangle, namely a universal, as Gallie (1997, p. 321) argues.

One may ask certain questions here about what this imaginative conception of an individual centaur might look like: for instance, will the imagined centaur have a particular color, be of a particular height, etc.? There is nothing problematic in answering these questions in the manner suggested above: initially, the imaginative conception of a centaur is less distinct and it can be

made clearer by adding more individual properties to the set of properties with which one begins. At this point, someone might worry that by adding more specifications to a certain conception will not make that conception clearer, but it will change it, so that the imaginer has a different conception all together. This worry might be addressed in either of the following ways: (i) one might argue that the initial conception is the same as the richer one, as it was already suggested; or (ii) one might argue that the initial conception is different from the richer one. Identity conditions for conceptions are not that clear, and making them so would take us too far from the concerns of the present paper. However, there are several things to say here: we use imagination when we interpret stories about mythological creatures, for instance centaurs. Some of these stories even name their native centaurs and once such a name is introduced, it is used throughout the story to refer to the same centaur. Think about the following situation: at the beginning of the story we are told that Flane is a brave centaur; by the end of the story, we will have learned that Flane has brown hair and green eyes, that he is the friend of Miradora, and uses a red bow to shoot his human enemies. If we set score by (ii) above, we would have to say that the conception of Flane we had at the beginning of the story is different from the one we had at its end. This is not how we talk about fictional objects, though. According to Reid, this should count as reason enough to prefer (i) to (ii).[19]

The issue is, of course, more complicated than this. More importantly, however, it is not peculiar to this theory of imagination, or to this kind of theory of fictional characters, as Parsons (1980, p. 190) correctly notes. According to him, a similar issue can be raised about set theory, more generally and even about the meaning of scientific terms. Indeed, it is not altogether clear when a certain scientific term entirely changes its meaning and when it simply gains a richer one, while its content remains the same.[20]

Even if we accept (i) and agree that a certain conception becomes clearer as the imaginer specifies more attributes the centaur imagined is supposed to have, one may raise another problem. Earlier, it was claimed that nonexistent objects are incomplete, in the sense that, for some property *P*, it is undecided whether a certain object has it or not. The worry then is this: just

how incomplete are these nonexistents? If an agent engaged in a certain imaginative act makes his initial conception clearer and clearer, by specifying more and more attributes that object might have, will not that imaginer make the object in question eventually complete? The simple answer is to say that such a situation might indeed occur. But this is not troublesome, since it was not claimed that nonexistent objects are *necessarily* incomplete. Moreover, this actually helps the case this paper makes, by emphasizing that it is the imaginer's action that completes the object; it is not given to that imaginer as complete, from the beginning.

A more sophisticated answer takes into account the great difficulty raised by such an aim. Nonexisting objects are, in principle, completable, but this does not mean that it is easy to do so. Nor does it mean that this task only requires a little bit of concentration on the part of the imaginer. On the contrary, it requires quite a lot and it is unclear that such a task can be achieved in an ordinary lifetime. To see why this is so, let us think about what ordinarily happens when someone actively imagines something. According to the theory developed here, an imaginer will be engaged in an act of imagination for a while, then he will probably return to more pressing issues. While the imaginer is thus engaged, he will not be concerned to specify all the attributes of the centaur he is imagining. He will probably think about it as having a particular shape, size, maybe even overall color, but he will not think about how many hairs the centaur has on his head, or what color his bow and arrows are or even whether his stomach is more human-like than horse-like. If we are only interested in offering a theory which explains how imagination actually works, then the worry above is not that worrisome; nonexistent objects are mainly incomplete, maybe completable, but this is of no consequence. The moral of the story is the same: there is an important distinction between the objects of perception and those of imagination. The latter are incomplete or, at least, not as complete as the former.

However, let us think, for the sake of the argument, what might happen if one took it upon himself to specify everything that can be specified about a particular centaur, thus completing the conception and the nonexistent object which corresponds to it. What would such an exercise entail? Our imaginer will have to specify not only what color the centaur's body has, the size of

his body, the size, shape and color of his stomach, etc., but also, for every second of a day in the "life" of that centaur, what type of food he ate, how much, what internal processes his cells underwent, etc. If we think that to change but one such quality of the centaur means changing the world of which he is a part, because every object in a world is the product of that world, then the imaginer will have to sit down and describe the possible world to which this centaur belongs, in such great detail, that it will take him ages to do so. Moreover, it is not only a question of not having enough time to do this, but also a question of what power of computing our imaginer's mind must have. This task is akin to that performed by God for every created thing in the world. So, yes, a nonexistent object is not necessarily incomplete; but to successfully complete it, one must be very much like God, and no mortal human-beings are like that. So, from a human-being's point of view, most of the objects of imagination are incomplete.[21]

This difference in the nature of existent and nonexistent objects, namely that the former are complete, whereas the latter are (for the most part) incomplete, is the basis for the second difference between perceptual and imaginative conception. In perceptually conceiving existent objects, one must roughly know only that this body is different from that one. Perceptual conception makes certain properties of objects salient to the mind. These properties may be very general ones, such as recognizing that something is a body, or that something is solid. But in imaginatively conceiving a nonexistent object, one must know something more specific about that object, since otherwise it would make no sense to say that this nonexistent object is different from that one – there is no way of individuating them in space and time, since they do not exist. The only way of distinguishing between Magorian and Bane of the Harry Potter novels is by refining each imaginative conception such that different properties are included in each set, corresponding to each of the two nonexistent objects.[22] Moreover, each of these two objects is nothing it is not conceived to be, and it is something inasmuch as we think of attributing certain qualities to it. Nature does not interfere with the process of combining and recombining these qualities. Imaginative conception bestows properties on the objects of imagination, and it is up to the imaginer to make such an object more or less complete. This is the third way of

distinguishing between perceptual and imaginative conception.

4 Conclusion

This paper presented a distinction which Reid should have drawn in *EIP*, but did not. This distinction concerns the sharp difference between the conception employed in perception and the one employed in imagination. The arguments discussed here showed that there are three ways in which perceptual conception differs from imaginative conception. First and foremost, perceptual conception does not essentially proceed by way of concepts, i.e. it is non-conceptual and not propositional, whereas imaginative conception is entirely conceptual. This distinction is true to the spirit of Reid's philosophy: for instance, he thinks that the presupposition of existence is not required for conception and hence conception is a different faculty from perception. In the same vein, the presupposition of attribution of a quality to an object, which is necessary for imaginative conception, is sufficient for a finer-grained distinction between different types of conceptions.

Second, the objects of perceptual conception are complete objects; the objects of imaginative conception are incomplete – one can explicitly endow an imagined centaur with more properties, while one imaginatively conceives it, thus turning it into a more definite object, in one's imagination. But this is not true in the case of the objects of perception – they are what they are, nothing more or less, and perception does not alter this. Third, perceptual conception *selects* or makes salient properties from the object perceived, whereas imaginative conception *bestows* properties on the object imagined.

If the arguments and analyses presented here are correct, this distinction is real, even though overlooked by Reid. Without making this distinction explicit, we have no means of understanding exactly how conception contributes what it does to perception and how it contributes what it does to imagination. The danger that looms large over Reid's understanding of these faculties is thinking that perception is an over-intellectualized process, reserved only for higher animals, like humans. This is a serious concern, given that he often argues that perception,

as he understands it, is a faculty that human agents have in common with brutes and non-speaking infants. If one were not able to perceive anything (or very little) unless one had a robust conceptual understanding of the objects and their surroundings, one would not be in a position to have any kind of initial knowledge about the external world. Neither would one be in a position to learn and add to the knowledge gained by perception. Reid's system needs this distinction and a charitable interpretation of the spirit of his project, like the one put forward in this paper, will see that this distinction is possible. However, further research is needed in order to establish what consequences this distinction has on the rest of Reid's philosophy.

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2 All references will be made to the *Edinburgh Edition of Thomas Reid*, Knud Haakonssen, general editor, published in the USA by The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania:

- *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense: A Critical Edition* (1764), Derek R. Brookes, editor, 1997 (*IHM* henceforth);
- *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man: A Critical Edition* (1785), Derek R. Brookes, ed., Knud Haakonssen, intro., Brookes and Haakonssen, annot., 2002 (*EIP* henceforth).

Citations will be given by using chapter or essay, section and page numbers. In some cases, the relevant lines will also be mentioned.

3 These two ways of employing conception are discussed by Reid in *EIP*, I. 1, p. 24 (lines 19–22; 29–33), and especially in *EIP*, IV. 1, p. 295–96.

4 Reid argues that imagination, "when it is distinguished from conception," is a species of conception, namely the one that can be employed about visible objects (*EIP*, IV. 1, p. 306). It may be a bit misleading to call the second type of conception 'imaginative conception'. The use of this label should, however, highlight the related, but different structures of perception and imagination. For a perceptual experience to take place, two necessary conditions must be satisfied: the perceiver must conceive the object and have an irresistible belief in the existence of the object perceived. By contrast, only one of these conditions is necessary for imagination: the imaginer must conceive a certain object, without regard to its existence.

5 If the conception involved in perception were nothing more than imagination, as Reid mistakenly thought (e.g. *EIP*, I. 1, p. 25), perception would turn out to be an overly intellectualized process. This is not only empirically contradicted by the fact that small children, and animals of all kinds can perceive, but it is also contradicted by what Reid thinks to be the case: he argues that brutes and infants do perceive, just like mature human agents do. The fact that Reid is aware of this issue, which received emprirical support only in the late 20th century, is very forward-thinking.

6 As Copenhaver (2006, p. 282) rightly observes, one of the crucial distinctions that Reid draws is between sensation and perception: the sensation that accompanies every perceptual experience supplies the "what-it's-like" feature of which we are aware when we perceive something, whereas perception proper is constituted by a representational content, meant to give us knowledge about the world around us.

7 According to Copenhaver (2010, p. 291) the belief component of a perceptual experience has the role of

supplying the perceiver with information regarding what type of object he is currently perceiving. She argues that this belief predicates certain properties to the object that the perceptual conception presents to the perceiver. However, perceptual belief does not have this role: Reid argues that, in perception, one is seized by a belief that the object perceptually conceived *exists* when it is thus conceived. So the only property that perceptual belief seems to be responsible for attributing to the object is existence (on the assumption that existence is such a property.) This issue will not be further developed in this paper, even though the problem of concept-application is all the more interesting, on the assumption that perceptual conception is not conceptual.

8 For more on the distinction between different notions of "immediacy" which Reid used, see Buras (2008).

9 Passages indicating that Reid thought that material substances can be perceived can be found throughout *EIP*, and there is nothing to prevent this type of perceptual experience from occurring in the absence of (accurate) perception of qualities. See, for instance, *EIP* II. 19, p. 219 (lines 29-35), and *EIP* IV. 3, p. 327.

10 See, for instance, his discussion of how the senses can be fallacious and how they could be improved, in *EIP* II. 22 and II. 21, respectively. This issue will not be further developed in this paper, but it makes it clear that bodies are objects of perception.

11 This issue brings to mind the controversy surrounding Reid's notion of acquired perception. Some Reid scholars believe that acquired perception is not proper perception, because it is inferential; while others think that it is no more inferential than original perception. For more details, see Van Cleve (2004) and Copenhaver (2010). Another way of drawing the line between original and acquired perception is to think that the former involves the non-conceptual type of conception, while the conception employed by the latter is fully conceptual. This issue will not be further developed in this paper.

12 Russell (1910) argued that we are acquainted only with sense-data (which are mind-dependent), universals and ourselves; material substances cannot be objects of acquaintance.

13 In discussing Reid's notion of conception, Nicholas Wolterstorff (2001, p. 6) uses the same idea of having in mind, or securing a mental grip onto something, to characterize it. Wolterstorff's usage is suggestive and appropriate. However, his notion of 'having in mind' is different from Donnellan's: Wolterstorff argues that the mental grip in question is secured by deploying a singular concept, understood to be something like a definite description (Wolterstorff (2001, p. 15)). Whereas, one of Donnellan's points is to show that one can have something in mind, even though a definite description used to describe it is not satisfied by that thing. Donnellan's notion allows one to form singular thoughts about external objects, in the absence of correct application of concepts to that thing, whereas Wolterstorff's does not. To fully settle this dispute, one would need to go beyond the purposes of the present paper, but it is important to note that Reid's notion of perceptual conception is better explained by Donnellan's notion of 'having in mind' for the reasons noted in the main text.

14 The idea that there is more to a substance than meets the eye, or, more generally, the mind, is also reminiscent of Locke, in a different way. Locke (*Essay*, II. xxxi. 1; xxxi. 3 and xxxi. 6) thought that our ideas of substances are incomplete, and thus inadequate, because there is more in the thing than in the idea; whereas our ideas of mixed modes, or

relations are adequate, and complete, because everything we think of a mode is in the idea we have of it. On the present interpretation of Reid, nonexistent things (some of which, at least, would be counted among mixed modes by Locke) are incomplete things, even though, in a Lockean jargon, one can say that our ideas of nonexistent things are still adequate. But substances are still seen by Reid as being complete things, and our conceptions of them quite inadequate.

15 This excerpt is to be found in Aberdeen MS 2131/8/ii/02 and is reproduced here from Nichols (2007, p. 46).

16 For more on this issue, see Nichols (2002).

17 Parsons (1980, p. 18-19). The set {roundness, squareness} is correlated with an impossible object. This paper will not discuss the difference between possible and impossible nonexistent objects.

18 Reid talks about the distinction between imagining a particular and conceiving a universal in *EIP*, V. 6, p. 394.

19 For more on the issue concerning how a name can be introduced to refer to something that does not yet exist and continues to refer to that *same* thing even after it starts to exist, see Jeshion (2010, p. 116-117). Reid comes close to this issue when he talks about how someone "may conceive a machine that never existed" (*EIP* V. 4, p. 375). If somebody conceiving such a machine were to build it, and name it, the name would refer to the conception and to the actual object, once it is finished. The issue concerning centaurs is different, since they will never exist, but sufficiently related to see that if we use names to talk about them, and Reid argues that we do, there is not much to prevent us from preferring (i) over (ii).

20 For more on this issue, see the discussion in Parsons (1980) and the works he cites, which are classics concerning the issue of meaning change: Field (1973) and Parsons (1975).

21 This qualification is needed because there are very simple objects that can be imagined completely, without requiring so much from the imaginer. For instance, imagining an electron coming into existence and being destroyed after just one second will require much less from an imaginer than imagining a centaur killing a human-being in a one-to-one fight.

22 Such a differentiation works on the assumption that something akin to a Lockean principle of individuation is applicable even to imagined objects: no things of the same kind could be co-occurrent.