Thomas Reid on Language

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1. Introduction

While he is best known for his rejection of 'the theory of ideas' and his role as a central figure in the 'Scottish school of Common Sense', Thomas Reid (1710-1796) made important contributions to the study of language and linguistic communication. Throughout his works, Reid's ultimate interest is in contributing to the development of a careful and accurate 'anatomy' (IHM, Introduction 98a, 12[1]) of the human mind, a delineation of its basic powers and principles; and this, not coincidentally, was ultimately to be in service of the anti-sceptical claims for which he is most famous. Whatever one's degree of interest in the latter, however, there's no denying that Reid affords plenty of rich material for those interested in language and the history of philosophy of language. Thus, interpreters have found in Reid anticipations of both 'ordinary language philosophy' (Jensen 1979) and modern speech act theory (Schuhmann and Smith 1990). As well, Reid's writings on language include: proto-Gricean, pragmatic explanations of the (in)felicity of certain forms of speech; foreshadowings of later 'direct reference' theories of meaning; an important discussion of the origins of language; claims about the relation of language to thought, and the connection between communication (linguistic and otherwise) and our capacity to 'read' the minds of others; and treatment of the origin, meaning and acquisition of general terms.

Reid was not a very systematic writer: his remarks on language (and on many of the other central topics he addresses) are spread across his substantial body of work, and this of course can make it harder to grasp and appreciate his views. The goal of this chapter is to isolate, extract, and introduce Reid's principal claims in and contributions to the philosophy of language, as it's known today. Along the way, the connections among these elements and their more salient points of contact with Reid's other philosophical views, and with the views of some other key figures in the history of philosophy, will be discussed.

2. On the Importance of Language to Philosophy

According to Henning Jensen (1979), "Reid's position represents an extremely pivotal stage in the upgrading of the importance of language in philosophy". In particular, Jensen is impressed by Reid's appeals to the everyday meaning of various terms, which would later figure centrally in 'ordinary language' philosophy of G.E. Moore and the later

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[1] In-text references to Reid provide indication of the relevant work and passage (essay, chapter, section, etc.), followed by relevant page numbers in both the Hamilton and Edinburgh editions of Reid. Thus, the above citation refers to the "Introduction" to Reid's *Inquiry*; p. 98a of Hamilton ('a' refers to the left-hand column, 'b' to the right-hand side), p. 12 of the Edinburgh version.

Wittgenstein, for example. Reid's concern with language, and with ordinary language in particular, is largely driven by his broader philosophical project of contributing to a better understanding of the human mind. In pursuit of this goal, language is seen by Reid both as a vital source of evidence and as a possible hindrance to theoretical progress.

In the first Essay of Reid's 1785 *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* ('Preliminary'), Reid makes explicit some of the fundamental substantive and methodological assumptions he is making in carrying out his project. Much of the discussion here concerns linguistic matters. Thus, the *Essays* begins: "There is no greater impediment to the advancement of knowledge than the ambiguity of words" (EIP I.1 219a, 17). (Reid does not intend anything technical by 'ambiguity' here; he means simply a lack of clarity and precision in what's meant.) This, he thinks, is not a problem that can be solved by providing rigorous definitions of all terms:

> "…it is evident that every word cannot be defined; for the definition must consist of words; and there could be no definition, if there were not words previously understood without definition." (ibid. 219b, 18).

The solution is to use common words "in their common acceptation" (ibid.); "when we have occasion to enlarge or restrict the meaning of a common word, or to give it more precision than it has in common language, the reader ought to have warning of this, otherwise we shall impose upon ourselves and upon him" (ibid. 230a, 38)

It is because "use is the arbiter of language" (ibid. 228b, 35) for Reid that he freely intermingles observations concerning the various faculties of the mind, avowals and defenses of various fundamental principles, and so on, with explicitly linguistic observations about the ordinary use of key terms. One important instance of this is Reid's "ordinary language analysis" of 'common sense' (EIP VI.2 421b-426a, 423-434), as Jensen (1979, p. 360) calls it. Another is Reid's discussion of Hume's use of the term 'impression' to describe the sensations occasioned in us by material objects (EIP I.1 227bff., 33ff.). This example also serves to illustrate the essential role that analogy – "the judg[ing] of things less known, by some similitude [we] observe, or think [we] observe, between them and things more familiar or better known" (EIP I.4 236b, 52) -- plays in human thought and language.

Our natural love of analogy, according to Reid, accounts for the ease with which we acquire language (Lett 71a, 193). It also explains many of the particular names we give to things, a notable case in point being our terms for various mental operations. Almost all the words we have for talking about mental operations -- 'apprehend', 'conceive', 'imagine', 'comprehend', 'deliberate', and so on -- are borrowed from our talk about the non-mental realm (EIP I.4 237b-238a, 54). In itself, this is natural and harmless. The danger is that, having been led by analogical thinking to the employment of certain words and certain familiar ways of thinking and talking, we will in turn be led by *that* to suppose certain similarities which, in fact, we have no evidence to suppose is real (ibid.; cf. EAP I.2 515b-516a, 14-15). For instance, in the case of 'impression', we know for example that a seal cannot make an impression upon wax unless there is "contact and

pressure" (EIP I.4 237b, 54); in the same way, Reid thought, many philosophers had taken it for granted that in perception material objects can affect the mind only mediately, via the interposition of some mental object. This is one source of 'the theory of ideas' – the view that the immediate object of thought (perception, memory, reasoning, consciousness, etc.) is always some specifically mental object (see EIP II.14 301a-302a, 175-178). Among the eventual consequences of this view, of course, is that the familiar processes we started out wanting to explain become problematic. In Hume, for instance, the mental *act* of sensing an object (the "impression") becomes the *object* of my thought (EIP I.1 228b, 35-36); and that object quickly usurps the worldly thing, the mind's interaction with which philosophers want to understand. Thus, it's early on in the *Treatise* that Hume tells us that "'tis impossible for us so much as conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions" (Hume, *Treatise* p. 67). Hence Reid's saying that "[I]deas seem to have something in their nature unfriendly to other existences" (IHM II.6 109a, 33).[2] Part of Reid's response here[3] is to point out that, while it is perhaps encouraged by the language we (quite understandably) use to talk about such things, we have no good grounds to grant the presumed analogy, any more than we have good grounds to think that the mind needs a hand to apprehend or a womb to conceive (*Orations*, p. 75).

A final example of the importance of attending to language as a way of avoiding philosophical error concerns the term 'idea'. (This example will prove important later on.) Reid of course denies the theory of ideas just mentioned. Does this mean that he wants to deny something as obvious as that we have ideas? Locke, for instance, thought that their existence was something so obvious as to hardly need remarking upon (*Essay* Introduction 8; Vol. 1, pp. 32-33). And Reid grants as much: in common language, 'to have an idea' of *x* means simply to think of *x* – an idea (or thought) is an act of the mind (EIP I.1 226b, 31); and no one denies that we think (have thoughts). As philosophers use the term, however, 'idea' refers (as above) to the immediate *object* of thought. And, Reid says: "I believe *ideas*, taken in this sense, to be a mere fiction of philosophers" (ibid.; cf. EIP II.14). Once again, then, for Reid determining the theoretical significance of the naturalness of a certain way of speaking requires understanding of what ordinary speakers do and do not mean by the term or phrase in question.

The preceding is enough to make it clear that, as much as Reid's attention to ordinary language might prompt thoughts of the later 'linguistic turn' (Rorty 1967) in philosophy, or the mid-20th century 'ordinary language' movement,[4] the concern with language

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[2] "They [ideas] were first introduced into philosophy, in the humble character of images or representatives of things; and in this character they seemed not only to be inoffensive, but to serve admirably well for explaining the operations of the human mind understanding. But since men began to reason clearly and distinctly about them, they have by degrees supplanted their constituents, and undermined the existence of every thing but themselves" (IHM II.6 109a, 33-4).
[3] But *only* part; Reid objects to the theory of ideas on other, purely non-linguistic grounds as well – for instance, that "if we should admit an image in the mind, or contiguous with it, we know as little how perception may be produced by this image as by the most distant object" (EIP II.14 302a, 178; compare *Oration III,* Todd ed.).
[4] Chappell ed. (1964) is a good introduction to the latter.

should not be over-stated. For Reid the interest is never in language for its own sake – "Disputes about words belong rather to grammarians than to philosophers" (EIP I.1 227a, 32), he says; and there is no suggestion that Reid thinks, for example, that philosophical problems are *merely* linguistic[5] – an idea sometimes associated (incorrectly, I believe) with the later Wittgenstein. For Reid, the attention to ordinary language is to a great extent prophylactic – it is the *abuse* of language, it would seem, that he is on guard against.

But Reid's concern goes deeper than this: as the preceding examples also make clear, Reid thinks that we must be cautious in inferring, even from the *correct use* of a given term or phrase, some substantive philosophical claim.[6] Nor is this just because some of our terms ('impression', 'conceive', etc.) have an analogical origin. Rather, it is because of *pragmatics*, which concerns the information arising from utterances, as opposed to that encoded in the words uttered. In several places, Reid provides some rather strikingly Gricean (Grice 1989) examples wherein it's perfectly appropriate to speak as we do even though what we say (and don't say), if taken entirely at face value, could easily lead to bad theory.

Thus, for example, while judgment is an essential element in *many* mental acts, including perception, we seldom will *say* 'I see *x* and judge it to be real', because that would be pleonastic - a "superfluity of speech" (EIP VI.1 415a, 410); and just because our adding 'I judge' is unnecessary, were we to do so we'd naturally be taken to mean something *more* than what's literally expressed – most likely, Reid says, the effect would be 'dogmatical' (EIP I.1 223a, 25). 'I conceive' or 'think', by contrast, is naturally used to express an opinion modestly, though of course when we say such things we typically *do* mean more than merely that we have a thought -- that is, a 'simple apprehension', without any "belief or judgment at all", which is all that conception involves (EIP I.1 223a, 24). Or, to take another example, the evidence we have that there is such a city as Rome is probable, not demonstrative. "Yet, in common language, it would sound oddly to say, it is probable that there is such a city as Rome, as that would imply some degree of doubt or uncertainty" (EIP VII.3 482b, 557).[7] As these examples show, Reid is well aware that language has the potential to mislead, even when it is not being used sloppily or being abused by the philosopher. To put the point anachronistically, Reid is aware of

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[5] At the same time, however, one might disagree with Schuhmann and Smith's claim that "we do not find examples of passages where Reid dismisses philosophical problems as *caused* by improper uses of language" (1990, p. 52) – he certainly thinks that such misuses can *abet* and *encourage* philosophical problems.

[6] This is something of which the best of the 'ordinary language' philosophers -- for example J. L. Austin (1975) – were quite aware.

[7] Compare Grice: "When someone makes such a remark as 'It looks red to me' a certain implication is carried, an implication which is disjunctive in form. It is implied either that the object referred to is known or believed by the speaker not to *be* red, *or* that it has been denied by someone else to be red, *or* that the speaker is doubtful whether it is red, *or* that someone else has expressed doubt whether it is red, *or* that the situation is such that though no doubt has actually been expressed and no denial has actually been made, some person or other might feel inclined towards denial or doubt if he were to address himself to the question whether the object is actually red" (1961: 124).

the dangers of inferring semantic facts merely the basis merely of the (im)propriety of certain claims – of the dangers, that is, of committing the 'pragmatic' (Salmon 1991) or 'speech act' (or 'assertion') (Searle 1969) fallacies.

Overall, then, Reid regards language as a potential obstacle to carrying out the sort of 'anatomy' of the human mind he wishes to promote. And yet, at the same time, he also sees it as a vital source of information in that study.[8] For example, he takes it to be a sign that something is a 'first principle' that it is somehow embedded in our language: "[some] opinions appear to be universal, from what is common in the structure of all languages' (EIP I.2 233b, 45). In fact, he goes further, saying:

> "Language is the express image and picture of human thoughts; and from the picture we may draw some certain conclusions concerning the original" (EIP VI.5 440b, 466; cf. Log 691b-692a, 112)

> "…every distinction to be found in the structure of a common language, is a real distinction.…I know nothing that can give so much light to the human faculties as a due consideration of the structure of language" (Lett 78b, 185)[9]

Such claims may seem to contradict the sort of careful handling of linguistic data that, as we've seen, Reid recommends. But it does not.[10] Particular forms of speech can mislead, or can mask substantive and controversial theoretical assumptions. In terms of its most general features, however -- those that all languages share -- language can provide us insights into the workings of the human mind. Thus, Reid thinks, we find in all languages a distinction between nouns and adjectives, between active and passive verbs (EIP I.2 233b, 46); a distinction between mind, its operations, and the objects of thought (EIP I.1 223b-224a, 26); certain rules of syntax or grammar; and so on (EIP VI.5 440b, 466; EIP I.1 224a, 26; EIP I.2 233b, 45-46; EIP I.5 238b, 56; EIP II.19 322b, 218; EAP I.2 515a-517a, 13-17). From this, we may infer such things as that we naturally conceive of the world in terms of subjects and qualities, that perception and other operations are taken to have mind-independent objects, that we have a notion of active power, and so on. Such inferences are defeasible – such a general features *may* be explained as merely accidental, or the result of some widely-held 'prejudice' (see, e.g. EIP VI. 440b, 465-466). In the absence of such a debunking explanation, however, they are perfectly reasonable. So,

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[8] The primary such source, Reid thinks, is "accurate reflection upon the operations of our own minds" (EIP I.5 238b, 56; IHM I.1 97a-98b, 11-12). But such reflection has its own difficulties (EIP I.6, IHM I.2), and the reliance upon linguistic data cannot be lightly dismissed.

[9] While, as in such passages, Reid regards thought as prior to language, in other places he makes it clear that language can shape and influence thought: "…our thoughts take their colour in some degree from the language we use; and…although language ought always to be subservient to thought, yet thought must be, at some times and in some degree, subservient to language" (EIP VI.8 474a, 539); and "When language is once learned, it may be useful even in our solitary meditations; and by clothing our thoughts with words, we may have a firmer hold of them" (EIP I.8 245a, 69).

[10] Jensen (1979, pp. 361-2) is very good on the close but imperfect correspondence between human language and thought, as Reid sees it.

whereas his immediate predecessors' investigations of the human mind were driven largely by introspection, Reid sees language as an important an equally legitimate resource in developing a science of the mind. Reid's view of the importance of language to philosophy, then, is far from exclusively negative.

3. Language and its Basis: Natural and Artificial Signs

It is important to understand Reid's views on language itself, and on what we today would call 'natural language', in relation to the rest of his philosophy. The recent rediscovery of Reid has centered on his views concerning epistemology – his response to the sceptic, his fallible foundationalism, etc. – and perception – notably, his rejection of 'the theory of ideas' in favor of 'direct realism'. An essential element in the latter is the distinction Reid draws between sensation and perception – something that J. J. Gibson (1966, Introduction) takes as the jumping-off point for his own theory of human perceptual systems. The sensation-perception distinction, however, is not fundamental for Reid: it is an instance of what D. D. Todd (1987) has called "Reid's semiotic", his theory of signs, which was the alternative he proposed to the ideal theorist's way of thinking about some of the mind's fundamental operations.

Sensations for Reid are distinctive among mental acts in that a sensation "hath no object distinct from the act itself" (EIP I.1 229a, 36) – "there is no difference between the sensation and the feeling of it" (EIP II.16 310a, 194). The tactile sensation I have upon touching a hard object, e.g., is like a pain, in that to have it *just is* to feel a certain way. In most instances of perception, for Reid, sensations serve as *signs* of material objects' qualities.[11] By this, Reid means no more than that, owing to our constitution (and indirectly, 'the will of our maker'), upon having a certain sensation we are led naturally to form a conception (thought) of and belief in the existence of the relevant quality existing in an object. (It is at this point that we have *perception*; see EIP II.5, IHM VI.20.) As Reid otherwise describes it, the sensation *"suggests"* to the mind a certain worldly object or quality. As with signs generally, there is no necessary connection between sign and thing signified here,[12] and no intrinsic feature of a sign that *makes it* the sign of some quality rather than another. Nor do our sensations resemble the qualities they signify – Berkeley, in Reid's view, was entirely correct in insisting that an 'idea' can be like nothing but another idea (*Principles* I.8, p. 27; *Second Dialogue*, p. 146). And yet, upon having a certain sensation, we find ourselves with an immediate conception and belief of a quality existing in some object. To say that the former 'suggests' or 'signifies' the latter does not "explain the manner of their connection";[13] it does, however, "express a fact, which every one may be conscious of" (IHM V.8 131b, 74; cf. IHM II.7 111a, 38)

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[11] The visual perception of figure is the exception: visible figure, which is not a sensation but a real 'external object' (IHM VI.7 142bff., 95ff.), is the sign of real figure.

[12] Visible figure once again provides an exception: see IHM VI.7 142bff., 95ff.

[13] The use of signs in Reid's theory differs importantly from its employment by contemporary 'teleosemanticists' such as Millikan (1984) and Dretske (1988), who try to *explain* intentionality. Reid takes the 'aboutness' of thought for granted, and makes no attempt to explain it.

– namely, that, by a law of our constitution, the one immediately "introduces" (a conception of) the other (IHM V.2 120a, 56).

Clearly, Reid's use of 'sign' (signification) fits comfortably Aristotle's characterization of signification as generating an understanding – as putting something in the mind, as it were (*de Interpretatione* 16b19-21). As Jennifer Ashworth (this volume) explains, this conception of signs in terms of their "epistemological impact" was retained in Augustine (*On Christian Doctrine*, Book II; O'Donnell trans.);[14] and, like Augustine (ibid.), Reid distinguishes between natural and artificial signs – between signs that signify what they do by nature, and those which do so "by habit and custom" (IHM V.3 121bff., 58ff.).[15] As to natural signs, they fall into three classes: those whose connection to the thing signified is discovered only by experience; those whose connection to the thing signified "is discovered to us by a natural principle, without reasoning or experience"; and those which, "though we never before had any notion or conception of the thing signified, do suggest it, or conjure it up, as it were, by a natural kind of magic, and at once give us a conception, and create in us a belief in it" (ibid.). It is the business of science to investigate the first class of natural signs. To the third, belong the sensations that figure in perception in the manner sketched above.[16] It is the second class of natural signs that interests us here: it comprises "*the natural language of mankind*" (IHM V.3 121b, 59).

Reid uses 'language' to refer to "all those signs which mankind use in order to communicate to others their thoughts and intentions, their purposes and desires (IHM IV.2 117b, 51). The signs of *natural* language -- certain "modulations of voice, gestures, and features" (ibid. 118a, 52) -- "have a meaning which every man understands by the principles of his nature" (ibid. 117a, 51): without reasoning or reflection, when we see/hear them we immediately pass to a conception and belief of others' thoughts and intentions. Thus, an infant hears an angry voice and immediately begins to cry; a certain gesture is naturally read as ostensive, another as indicating assent; and so on. This 'common language', though "scanty", is "the seed of [artificial] language" (Lett 71a, 192); it provides the necessary basis for the invention and deployment of artificial signs, most notably words, according to Reid:

> "[A]ll artificial language supposes some compact or agreement to affix a certain meaning to certain signs; therefore there must be compacts or agreements before the use of artificial signs; but there can be no compact or agreement without signs,

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[14] Augustine writes that "a sign is a thing which, over and above the impression it makes on the senses, causes something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself."

[15] In terms of contemporary invocations of the relevant distinction, one thinks for example of Grice's (1989) distinction between natural and non-natural meaning, and Dretske's (1988) discussion of symbols *versus* natural signs.

[16] Such perception is *original* perception. In *acquired* perception, the outputs of original perception or some quality of things comes, *through experience*, to serve as the sign of some other objectual quality or state of affairs. So, for example, original perception acquaints me with the sound of the passing coach; after sufficient experience, upon hearing the same sound I can learn (perceive) that a coach is passing (this example is at IHM IV.1 117b, 50; Reid provides discussion of the general phenomenon at IHM VI.20-23 and EIP II.21-22).

> now without language; and therefore there must be a natural language before any artificial language can be invented." (IHM IV.2 117b-118a, 51)

As Todd (1987) notes, one obvious target of Reid's argument here, of course, is Locke, who held that language was purely an invention of men. According to Locke, to enable the "communication of thoughts", humans, by a mutual and "voluntary imposition", invented words to serve as "sensible marks of ideas"[17] (*Essay* II.2.1-2; Vol. 2, pp. 8-9). As we'll see, Reid rejects the latter, 'ideational' view of linguistic meaning – the view that the meaning of a word is the mental act or object it expresses or to which it corresponds. For now, however, Reid's claim is that people cannot have invented language so as to "bring their ideas out into the open (so to speak) where others could see them" (Essay III, Of Words). *Artificial* language, of course, is developed so as to *hone* and *extend* our communicative powers, but if our thoughts, intentions, purposes, and so on, were not already to some degree 'out in the open' – if we had no prior grip on others' intentional states – we would lack a communicative medium in which to undertake the necessary compact. It is the job of natural language to give us that initial communicative ability.

Some might wonder whether Reid's argument here is too quick. Condillac, for example, drew a distinction similar to Reid's, amongst different types of sign – in Condillac's case, between accidental, natural, and artificial signs. According to Condillac, however, while natural signs (such as a "natural cry") are (as in Reid) instinctively produced without any explicit communicative intention, we must *learn* their signification through being exposed to their characteristic association with what they signify (Condillac *Essay* I.2.4 and II.1.1 §§1-4; Falkenstein 2010 Section 6). (In terms of Reid's tripartite division, Condillac appears to assimilate 'the natural language of mankind' to the *first* type of natural sign.)

To such a suggestion, Reid has two objections. First, he claims, it "contradict[s] all experience": we observe that children *learn* that flames will burn and knives will cut, and they do so at different rates and at different points in their lives; whereas "we know that an angry countenance will fright a child in the cradle" immediately, before they've had exposure to repetitions of the relevant pattern, and that this is "common to the whole species" (449b, 665a). Second, when we experience both a sign and the thing signified, experience can instruct us how the sign is to be interpreted – this is what happens with the first class of natural signs (see above); but in the case at hand, we see the signs only, and so *cannot* learn of their connection to others' "thoughts and passions" by experience; therefore, "there must be some earlier source of this knowledge" (EIP VI.5 449b-450a, 485-486; cf. EAP V.6 664b-665a, 330-331).[18]

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[17] "…words, in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but *the ideas in the mind of him that uses* them" (*Essay* III.2.2; Vol. 2, p. 9).

[18] Much the same position has recently been endorsed by Sperber (1995), albeit in rather different terms. According to Sperber, it is mistake to think that what enables communication is the possession of a common language – a code that provides a mapping between sounds (/shapes) and ideas, with inference sometimes providing an in-principle-dispensable shortcut. Rather, it is 'inference' – i.e., the ability to grasp others' intentional states – which grounds (linguistic)

5. Linguistic Meaning: Reference and the Role of Conception

In many ways, it is fair to say that Reid regards humans as distinctively 'sign-minded' creatures.[19] In terms of linguistic meaning, or 'artificial' signs and language, throughout his works, Reid consistently speaks of words as 'signs', and of 'signification', with 'meaning' occasionally being used in place of the latter. As artificial signs, words in themselves are merely "empty sounds" (EIP V.2 391b, 359) or insignificant marks on the page. Susan V. Castagnetto writes:

> "A word does not have meaning for the user unless that user has an understanding or conception of what the word is being used to signify." (1992, p. 42)[20]

Phillip Cummins puts it this way:

> "To say that word signifies is really to say that a person signifies something by it. If a word is used with meaning or is understood by somebody, that person intends a thought-object which is what the word signifies." (1976, p. 66)

As the discussion of the previous Section would lead one to expect, it is *not* Reid's view that the speaker is free to mean whatever he/she likes by a given term: while artificial (versus) natural signs owe their signifying power – their power to give rise to an understanding, the occurrence of a thought, in the hearer -- to humans' communicative intentions, there is also an important *conventional* element to linguistic meaning. Communication requires that speaker and hearer "affix the same meaning or notion – that is, the same conception to them" (EIP IV.1 364a, 303; cf. EIP V.2 391b, 359); and "[t]he *common* meaning is the standard by which such conceptions are formed" (EIP IV.1 364a, 303; emphasis added):

> "The meaning of the word is the thing conceived; and that meaning is the conception affixed to it by those who best understand the language" (EIP IV.1 364b, 303)

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communication, with language being the in-principle-optional add-on. Recasting this in Reid's terms: language isn't, and cannot be, exhausted by 'artificial signs' (what *Sperber* calls 'language'); it is preceded and enabled by 'the natural language of mankind', which affords us a prereflective, pre-conventional understanding of others' intentional states.

[19] At least in terms of degree. At EAP V.6 (665b, 333), for example, Reid seems to allow that a grasp of natural signs is exhibited in "social intercourse among brute-animals, and between some of them and man". Reid's 'semiotic' is evident as well in his account of acquired (vs. 'original') perception (see note 16 above), and in the analogy he draws between perception and the credit we give human testimony (IHM VI.24), discussion of which would carry us too far afield here.

[20] The 'or' here is, plausibly, read as expressing identity for Reid. He, like Hobbes, appears to be of the view that "*Understanding* [is] nothing else, but conception caused by speech" (1651/1991, Chapter 5, p. 30).

Notice: the meaning of the word is *the thing conceived* – the *thought-<u>object</u>*, in Cummins' phrase. Conceptions and intentions *are* important here, for two reasons. They are important, first, because we are talking about signs, and understanding them as things which express and prompt thoughts and understanding ("conceptions", to use Reid's term). And second, because as just noted the *source* of artificial signs' signifying power, and their having the *particular* meaning that they do, is to be explained in terms of "some compact or agreement" among language-users (IHM IV.2 117b, 51). So again: conceptions and intentions matter to language and linguistic communication. But, except when we are talking about the mind, thoughts are not what terms *signify*. They signify whatever object is the object of the conception expressed by the speaker, and understood by the hearer. There is a very real sense, then, in which Reid is to be taken literally when he says that individuals are "expressed in language" (EIP IV.1 364b, 303).[21] And, except when we are deliberately and explicitly using of a common word with an 'enlarged' or 'restricted' meaning (EIP I.1 230a, 38), what it signifies is a function of *ordinary* use, such use being "the arbiter of language" (ibid. 228b, 35).

In short, Reid appears to be operating with a straightforward, referential theory of meaning (cf. Jensen, p. 363): words signify objects (things, properties, etc.), and not anything mental (ideas, conceptions, etc.). Or perhaps it would be better to say that, for his purposes, Reid is content to operate with such an unremarkable, seemingly common-sensical view of meaning; certainly he does not further discuss the nature of linguistic meaning *per se*. He does, however, address important linguistic phenomena beyond those already discussed. Among the latter, what gets perhaps the greatest attention from Reid, and a case that can seem to place the view of meaning just outlined under serious stress, is the nature of general terms.

5. On General Terms and Conceptions

While his views, including his views on language, depart in important ways from those of his immediate predecessors, they also converge on many points, linguistic and otherwise. On the matter discussed in Section 2 above, for example – Reid's concern that language, and unclear and non-standards uses thereof in particular, can be an "impediment to the advancement of knowledge" (EIP I.1 219a, 17) – there are clear echoes of Berkeley, who is moved to preface his own views with discussion "concerning the nature and abuse of language" (*Principles*, Introduction para. 6, p. 9).

As Berkeley saw it, the chief cause of philosophical confusion is the Lockean doctrine of abstract ideas (ibid.), and the assumptions about the language that help motivate it. Locke

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[21] For Reid, recall, sensation is unique among our mental acts in that it "hath no object distinct from the act itself" (EIP I.1 229a, 36). The rest of our mental operations, including conception, always has an object distinct from itself (EIP II.11, 292b, 161; EIP I.1 223b-224a, 26) – they are, as we'd say, *intentional* acts. It bears emphasizing as well that having a conception of *x*, in Reid's sense, is not to be understood as subsuming *x* under a concept or entertaining a proposition about *x*; it is, rather, to *apprehend x*, to *have it in mind*, to *have a mental grip* on it (see Wolterstorff 2001, pp. 9-12; Van Cleve 2004, p. 107).

arrives at that view by combining several thesis: first, that "words, in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but *the ideas in the mind of him that uses them*" (*Essay* III.2.2; Vol. 2, p. 9); second, that everything that exists is particular; and third, that if language and linguistic communication are to be possible, there must be general terms – terms that signify, not individuals, but kinds of things, essences, 'universals' (i.e., qualities that can be had by more than one things), and so on. Locke's answer to the resulting tension, of course, is to claim that "[w]ords become general by being made signs of general ideas: and ideas become general, by separating from them the circumstances of time and place, and any other ideas that may determine them to this or that particular existence" (*Essay* III.3.6; Vol. 2, pp. 16-17). The latter process Locke calls "abstraction", and the general ideas to which it gives rise, "abstract ideas".

Berkeley shares Locke's commitment to the three theses just described. But he finds Locke's own solution to the problem of how they can all be true deeply problematic. Not only is Lockean abstraction impossible, according to Berkeley, Locke is quite wrong to think that it is necessary for explaining certain phenomena – in particular, our capacity to think and talk about *types* of things. As to the former: *any* idea is particular – one cannot think of brown, for example, without thinking of a particular shade of brown; if one strips away all particularity from an idea, one ends up with no idea at all (*Principles*, Introduction para. 10, p. 11; *First Dialogue*, pp. 131-132). As to the latter, Berkeley offers the following alternative to Locke's unsatisfactory view of how we come to have general ideas: "an idea, which considered in itself is particular, becomes general, by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort" (*Principles*, Introduction 12, pp. 13-14). Since words signify ideas, general terms signify such general ideas; and so we can, Berkeley thinks, explain what needs explaining without recourse to abstraction and abstract ideas.

Against this background, Reid's discussion of general terms (and conceptions) is a notable example of the characteristic combination of orthodox and heterodox claims alluded to above. Before considering Reid's positive views, however, it is important to note that, as he sees it, both Locke and Berkeley only *appear* to be explaining what's at issue. For both of their accounts are obviously regressive: Locke's requires that we already know which features of an idea determine it to this or that existence and which do not; Berkeley's requires that we already know which other ideas are "of the same sort". In either case, what's being presumed is precisely what the theorist is claiming to have explained – namely, our capacity for general thoughts (e.g., EIP V.6 409a, 397).

As just discussed, Reid is operating with a referential view of linguistic meaning. In the case of proper names, they "are intended to signify one individual only" (EIP I.1 389a, 354), and none of the relevant parties regard *this* type of case as particularly problematic – in Reid's case, he mentions proper names only so as to immediately set them aside. Granted, Reid's view of proper names as signifying individual things, rather than ideas, both separates him from Locke and anticipates Mill (1843/1963). However, what merits attention for him, as for Locke and Berkeley, is not proper names but the apparent generality at least implicit in most of our talk: "*All* other words of language [besides proper names]," Reid says, "are general words, not appropriated to signify any one

individual thing, but equally related to many" (ibid.; emphasis added). In addition, Reid agrees that everything that exists is a particular (e.g., EIP V.1 389a-b, 355). So, what do general terms signify for Reid?

Obviously, they won't, and can't signify ideas in the sense intended by Locke, Berkeley, or any other proponent of 'the theory of ideas' – since, as we've seen Reid thinks "*ideas*, taken in th[at] sense, to be a mere fiction of philosophers" (EIP I.1 226b, 31). It might appear, however, that Reid's own view here *is* ideational, in the sense that it takes general terms, if not proper names, to signify specifically mental objects. As we saw in Section 2, Reid (of course!) allows 'ideas' in the sense of *thoughts* ("conceptions"); and there are places in Reid's discussion of general terms that suggest that *these* are what general terms signify. At first blush, the following passage in particular seems clearly to support this reading:

> "…every attribute, common to several individuals, may be expressed by a general term, which is the sign of the general conception". (EIP V.3 395b, 368; cf. EIP IV.1 364b, 304)

And, surely, it *must* be conceptions, or *some*thing mental, to which such terms refer. After all, what else *could* they signify? Universals? *Qua* non-particular things, they do not by Reid's lights exist! Natural though it may be, however, it would in fact be a mistake to think that Reid's account of general terms has it that their meaning is the thoughts or conceptions they express – that Reid's view is, as it were, a kind of watered down Lockean view, an ideational view without the ideas. Once again, this way of reading Reid is very natural. But there are very good reasons for thinking that this is not Reid's position, and that the naturalness of so reading him is really evidence of the distinctiveness of his actual view.

While in the passage above Reid says that general terms are signs of general conceptions, there are many more places where he says that what they signify is something *non*-mental. For instance: that it is *attributes* that "must…be expressed by general words" (EIP V.1 389b, 355); that *classes* are what "are called kinds and sorts; and, in the scholastic language, *genera* and *species*" (EIP V.1 390a, 356); and that general terms (unlike proper names) "signify not any individual thing, but attributes common to many individuals" (EIP V.3 396b, 370).[22] Or again:

> "To conceive the meaning of a general word, and to conceive that which it signifies, is the same thing. We conceive distinctly the meaning of general terms, therefore we distinctly conceive what they signify. But such terms do not signify any individual, but what is common to many individuals; therefore, we have a distinct conception of things common to many individuals – that is, we have distinct general conceptions." (EIP V.2 393b, 363)

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[22] One could hold that such items (attributes, classes, etc.) just *are* general conceptions, but it is obvious that this is not Reid's view – see just below.

Words, then, can be said to "the signs of our thoughts" (EIP VI.8 474a, 538), or to *express* our thoughts; so too, we can say that, when used successfully to communicate, what words signify "is conceived by the mind of both the speaker and hearer" (EIP V.2 391b, 359). These are perfectly harmless claims: they immediately follow from the fact that we use such terms to communicate, to cause conceptions to arise in others, and that *qua* artificial signs they communicate what they do in virtue of the thoughts, intentions, etc., of languages users (Section 4). A term can be "called a general word," however, only "because that which it signifies is general" (ibid.); and no *conception* is general – a conception is "an individual act" (ibid. 391b, 360).

Reid says that there is *one* sense in which "most words (indeed all general words) are the signs of ideas" – namely, if ideas are understood simply to be "general objects of conception" (EIP V.6 404a-b, 387). But, of course, the objects of conceptions are not the conceptions themselves. Why then would Reid *say* in the passage cited about that "a general term,…is the sign of the general conception" (EIP V.3 395b, 368))? Well, as Reid himself was at pains to emphasize, our terms for various mental operations suffer from an act/object ambiguity. And, in the case at hand, we have further evidence that Reid's is not an ideational view. For it is only *qua object* of the relevant mental act that a conception can be said to be what a general term signifies:

> "We must here beware of the ambiguity of the word *conception*, which sometimes signifies the act of the mind in conceiving, sometimes the thing conceived, which is the object of that act. If the word be taken in the first sense, I acknowledge that very act of the mind is an individuals act; the universality, therefore, is not in the act of the mind, but in the object or thing conceived. The thing conceived is an attribute common to many subjects, or it is a genus or species common to many individuals." (EIP V.2 393b-394a, 364).[23]

> "The words notion and conception, in their proper and most common sense, signify the act or operation of the mind in conceiving an object. In a figurative sense, they are sometimes put for the object conceived. I think they are rarely, if ever, used in this figurative sense, *except when we speak of what we call general notions or general conceptions*. (EIP V.5 403b, 385; emphasis added).

So, when Reid says that "every attribute, common to several individuals, may be expressed by a general term, which is the sign of the general conception" (EIP V.3 395b, 368), he is speaking figuratively. Properly speaking, and Reid's real view, is that general terms signify the non-mental objects that are the *objects* of such acts.

But how is that possible? Reid says that "every creature which God has made, in the heavens above, or in the earth below, or in the waters under the earth, is an individual" (EIP V.1 389a-b, 355). So there *are no* universals, no attributes, no *genera* or *species* – in

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[23] Here is one passage in which Reid himself switches from conception-as-act to conception-as-object in midstream, as it were: "To begin with the conceptions expressed by general terms – that is, by such general words as may be the subject or the predicate of a proposition. They are either attributes of things, or they are the *genera* and *species* of things" (EIP V.2 391b-392a, 360).

short, no general objects – to serve as the objects of our general conceptions, and so the meanings of general terms. To this, Reid's answer is straightforward. It is not the answer that has come to be associated with Meinong (1904/1960) – namely, that there is a sense in which such non-actual objects *do* exist. Reid's answer, rather, is to insist that "we have power to conceive things which neither do nor ever did exist. We have power to conceive attributes without regards to their existence" (EIPV.5 403b, 385).[24] The error, as Reid sees it, of both Locke and the Platonists is to suppose that *attributes* (universals) or *kinds* of things *must* exist – either as mind-independent 'forms', or as abstract ideas – in order for us to be able to conceive of them.[25]

So how *are* general thoughts (conceptions) possible, on Reid's view? In one sense, the question is perfectly answerable. Such thoughts are made possible by three operations of the mind: analyzing a subject into its known attributes, and giving a name to each; observing one or more of these attributes to be common to many subjects; and combining into a whole several of these attributes and giving that combination a name. The first two underlie our capacity to think of universals; the third is what underlies the formation of conceptions of *genera* and *species* (EIP V.2 394a-b, 365-366). There is no special training required for the performance of such operations – "the invention and use of general words…is not a subtle invention of philosophers, but an operation which all men perform by the light of common sense" (EIP V.1 390b, 357). But neither does one always, or even typically, acquire one's general terms by carrying out the relevant operations oneself. Sometimes one learns the meaning of such a word by being presented with a definition. Most often, however, such terms are acquired "by a kind of induction, by observing to what individuals they are applied by those who understand the language. We learn by habit to use them as we see others do, even when we have not a precise meaning annexed to them" (EIP V.2 393a, 363). Thus, as Reid puts it, "[t]he labour of forming abstract notions, is the labour of learning to speak, and to understand what is spoken" (EIP V.6 409b, 398). Coupled with Reid's claim that "[t]he meaning of the word is the thing conceived; and that meaning is the conception affixed to it by those who best understand the language" (EIP IV.1 364b, 303), there is obviously a natural home here for the notion of 'the division of linguistic labor', as Putnam (1975) calls it.[26] More broadly, as Susan Castagnetto points out in her fine discussion of Reid's views on general conceptions (1992; at pp. 55-56), Reid's remarks on the acquisition of general conceptions depict it as in many cases a decidedly *social* process: we do not start with our own ideas, abstract away some of their features, and arrive at a general conception which may or may not match those that others' associate with a given term; rather, we start with public language and public objects, and learn by 'habit' and 'a kind of induction' that some of these things' shared features, but not others, are what's signified by a given general term.

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[24] There is good reason to think that, contrary to how he is customarily interpreted, this is in fact Meinong's view as well; see Van Cleve (1996) and Nichols (2002).

[25] See Cummins 1976, especially p. 71, where supporting passages from Reid are given.

[26] The connection with Putnam is noted by Coady (2004, p, 191); one passage that strongly suggests the idea in Reid is EIP V.2 393a-b, 362-363. See too Lett 70b-71a, 191-193, where Reid compares language to both "a huge a complicated machine" and "a tree", with various individuals and successive generations affecting changes and improvements, contributing to its overall state.

This is indeed a noteworthy feature of Reid's view. But of course, it leaves unanswered the *hard* version of the question posed above: while it depicts their creation and acquisition as the result of various operations, both solitary and public, it does not yet tell us how general conceptions are possible *at all*.[27] To this question, Reid does not give or attempt to give an answer. In general, he regards it as a mistake, albeit an extremely natural and tempting one, to attempt to explain our most fundamental cognitive abilities.[28] His attitude towards our capacity for general thoughts, and so for having general terms in our language, is no different:

> "As to the manner how we conceive universals, I confess my ignorance. I know not how I hear, or see, or remember, and as little do I know how I conceive things that have no existence. In all our original faculties, the fabric and manner of operation is, I apprehend, beyond our comprehension, and perhaps is perfectly understood by him only who made them." (EIP V.6 407b-408a, 394).

6. The Social Operations of the Mind

Since we typically use language to communicate with others, there is a sense in which everyone must admit that language and its users are social. At several points in our consideration of Reid's views on language, however, we have seen Reid making points which depicts language, and us, as more deeply and interestingly social. One instance of this is the importance of ordinary use as setting the standard for correct use; another is the significance of language as affording evidence of the general character of our thought; another is our possessing a natural means of automatically grasping others' intentional states; and another still is the essentially social process by which we've come to have most of the words we possess to form most of the conceptions we do. In all of these respects, Reid's orientation is decidedly anti-individualistic. Whereas, of course, if one adheres to the theory of ideas, for example, *everything* begins at home, as it were, with one's own stock of ideas; from there, the task is (for the individual) to recover and (for the theorist) to explain engagement with the familiar world of things and persons.

Yet another example of Reid's anti-individualism, he commitment to a view of humans and language as deeply social from the first, is his discussion of 'social operations of the mind', "such operations as necessarily suppose an intercourse with some other intelligent being" (EIP I.8 244b, 68); they "can have no existence without the intervention of some other intelligent being, who acts a part in them" (EAP V.6 664a, 330). These "social intellectual operations" (EIP I.8 244b, 69) include asking or receiving information, giving or receiving testimony, asking or accepting a favoring, and giving or receiving a promise. Such operations, Reid says, are as natural as "solitary" operations such as judging, conceiving, perceiving, remembering, imagining, willing, and so on – they "are found in

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[27] Castagnetto (1992) is very clear about this as well.

[28] "It is genius, and not the want of it, that adulterates philosophy, and fills it with error and false theory" (IHM I.2 99b, 15).

every individual of the species, even before the use of reason" (EAP V.6 664b, 331; cf.
EIP I.8 244b-245a, 69). So too, they are "simple" or unanalyzable in terms of some more
basic operation(s). Thus, just as it is a mistake to try to reduce one or more solitary
operations to another, as the ideal theorist does when he tries to reduce memory,
perception, imagination, and so on to consciousness (the perception of ideas in one's
mind) (IHM VII 206b, 210), it would be a mistake to try to reduce social operations to
solitary ones. "To ask a question," for example, "is as simple an operation as to judge or
to reason; yet it is neither judgment nor reasoning, nor simple apprehension, nor is it any
combination of these" (EIP I.8 244b, 68; cf. EAP V.6 664a-b, 331).

Unsurprisingly, the distinction between solitary and social operations[29] shows up in
language. First, the expression of solitary acts "by words, or any other sensible sign, is
accidental": one may reason, remember, perceive, and so on, without expressing one's
conclusion, memory, or perception, in words. By contrast, just because they are social,
and because they necessarily involve interaction with another intelligent agent, in the
social operations "the expression is essential" (EAP V.6 664a, 330), and that expression
demands investigation: "an analysis of such speeches, and of the operations of the mind
which they express, would be of real use, and perhaps would discover how imperfect an
enumeration the logicians have given of the powers of human understanding" (Log 692a,
113; cf. Lett 72a, 195).[30]

However, while "[t]he expression of a question, or of a promise, is as capable of being
analyzed as a proposition is" (EIP I.8 245b, 70), it is instead the *proposition* – the
complete sentence, which can be true or false, which is the expression of the solitary act
of judgment (ibid. 245a, 70)[31] – that has preoccupied philosophers.[32] Thus, for example,
while Aristotle recognizes the existence of other kinds of speech – prayers and wishes,
e.g. – he "remits them to oratory or poetry" (Log 692a, 112). Centuries later, Hobbes
would do the same: recognizing "divers kinds of speech" (prayers, promises, threats,
commands, complaints, etc.), Hobbes says that "[i]n philosophy, there is but one kind of

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[29] Coady, for one, thinks that Reid assumes too neat of a distinction between the two. For
example, he says, "making a judgment can serve a solitary or social purpose" (2004, p. 198). So
too, of course, while social operations as such might not be *reducible* to some combination of
solitary acts, they may very well include and presume various of the latter. Clearly, there is much
more to be said here.

[30] In a letter to James Gregory (Lett 70aff, 191ff.), Reid says that while the 'natural' unit of
speech is a sentence, it is incredible that language would have begun with that idea, with our
ancestors first generating the parts of sentences and then assembling them into wholes.

[31] A 'proposition', for Reid, is not an abstract object but "a kind of speech" (Log 692a, 112),
"kind of sentence" (EAP V.7 671b, 346), "a complete sentence" (EIP VI.1 414a, 408). As to
'judgment', Reid means "every determination of the mind concerning what is true or false" (EIP
VI.1 415b, 411). Most of our judgments are formed naturally and unreflectively, and many of the
mind's operations have judgment as either a component or a natural consequence. So, for
example, he speaks of "the senses, memory and consciousness" as "judging faculties" (EIP VI. 1
414a, 410).

[32] In a similar fashion, and as part of his critique of abstract ideas, Berkeley complains that Locke
(and others) simply assume that "language has no other end but the communication of ideas"; see
Principles Introduction para. 19ff., pp. 19ff.

speech useful, which…[is called a] proposition" (quoted in Hungerland and Vick 1973, p. 469).

In the mid-twentieth century, of course, J. L. Austin would begin his *How to do Things With Words* with precisely the same complaint as Reid's about the neglect of certain forms of speech:[33]

> "It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely." (1975, p. 1)

The development of 'speech act theory', by Austin himself, John Searle (1969), and P. F. Strawson (1964), for example, was intended precisely to counter this assumption and remedy the neglect of the various other things we do with words, besides expressing truth-evaluable judgments. There is, in Reid, nothing approaching the kind of systematic treatment of speech acts ('speeches', as Reid calls them) that these later theorists would propose. But the connection is unmistakable (see Schuhmann and Smith 1990). And Reid's views on two types of social operations – namely, testimony and promising – have recently gotten focused attention.[34]

However, to see Reid's remarks on the social operations as significant *merely* because they anticipate contemporary speech act theory would be a mistake. While the phenomenon is importantly linguistic, the implications of Reid's views on 'social operations' go beyond philosophy of language. For it is not just that a treatment of language that dismissed or ignored questions, commands, promises, etc., or that tried to reduce them either to 'solitary' operations or other forms of speech (e.g., simple assertions of propositions) would be incomplete linguistic theory. A failure to appreciate the social operations, and to see that they are "specifically different from the solitary" (EAP V.6 664a, 330), would lead to an impoverished picture of "*the powers of human understanding*" (Log 692a, 113; emphasis added). After all, these social operations – which it is "the primary and direct intention of language" to express – are social operations *of the mind*; and as we've seen, Reid thinks that "in the social operations the expression their expression is essential" – "[they] can have no existence without the intervention of some other intelligent being, who acts a part in them" (EAP V.6 664a, 330). They are, as Coady puts it, "social mental" acts (2006, p. 186; cf. Yaffe 2007, pp. 284-5); and it is part of Reid's point in stressing their reality, importance, and irreducibility, that some of our most fundamental mental acts essentially involve other people – the power we have of engaging in them is "a distinct faculty given by our Maker, and a part of our constitution, like the powers of seeing and hearing" (EAP V.6

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[33] Reid's affinity with Austin here has been noted by others: see Coady 2004, p. 202, n. 7.

[34] In addition to Shuhmann and Smith's more general discussion, both Yaffe 2007 and Coady 2004, for example, discuss Reid's views on promises; Coady's 1992, which has been largely responsible for the recent spate of work on testimony, develops at length a broadly Reidian account thereof.

664b, 331).[35] In this way, it is a deeply social view, not just of language, but of persons and the mind as well, that Reid is promoting.[36]

7. Conclusion

In his writings, Reid's primary target is an improved understanding of the mind, and his remarks on language and various linguistic phenomena are spread throughout his works. Nevertheless, it is clear that Reid made important contributions to its study and that on several points he anticipated later developments. Like Reid's views themselves, the significance of his contributions is not easily summarized. That Reid came at language, approaching it both as a source of data and as an important subject in his efforts towards an anatomy of the human mind, however, is significant. Indeed, two important themes that have emerged here are, first, that language should not be studied in isolation from a consideration the mind and various other non-linguistic phenomena; and second, and relatedly, that to understand thought and language will include seeing how they relate us to the objects, persons, and society that surround us.

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[35] These words of Reid's, and his observation that the social operations "suppose a conviction of the existence of other intelligent beings" (EIP I.8 244b, 68), once again clearly anticipate Austin: "…believing in other persons, in authority and testimony, is an essential part of the act of communicating, an act which we all constantly perform. It is as much an irreducible part of our experience as, say, giving promises, or playing competitive games, or even sensing coloured patches" (1946, 115).

[36] The preceding stands in stark contrast to what Shuhmann and Smith (1990) say in assessing Reid's views. While crediting Reid with anticipating many points of 20th C speech act theory, Schuhmann and Smith nonetheless think that what they call Reid's "Cartesianism" about the mind "thwarts any claims which might be made on his behalf to the effect that he had a full-blown theory of speech acts in the modern sense" (p. 58). On the current reading, whatever Reid's stance on the relation between mind and body, part of the point of his discussion of the social operations of the mind is to counter the individualism and extreme introversion evident in Descartes', and many others', thinking about the mind. (Coady (2004, p. 191) is very good here, as is Castagnetto (1992, p. 59, n. 14), who responds to similar remarks by Jensen (1979, p. 373).) See, for example, Reid's talk of "the intercourse of human minds, by which their thoughts and sentiments are exchanged, and their souls mingle together, as it were" (664a). Coady (ibid.) also suggests that Reid's views on the social operations of the mind foreshadow recent views in philosophy of mind and semantics that feature 'wide content'; the same connection can be seen, of course, with Reid's account of linguistic meaning and the object-directedness of conceptions generally (see Section 4, including note 21).

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