

Day 2 Session 5

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SPEAKERS

Benjamin Hill, Lewis Powell, Alastair Crosby, Kenneth Pearce, Benjamin Formanek

- K** Kenneth Pearce 01:18
All right, welcome back, everybody. Our last session is going to be a paper titled Thomas Reid and the Priority Thesis: A Defence Against Turri by Benjamin Formanek from Western University and the commentator is going to be Lewis Powell from the University of Buffalo. So I'm going to go ahead and I'm going to play the video.
- B** Benjamin Formanek 01:56
Everyone, thanks for listening. My name is Benjamin Formanek and I'm currently a PhD student at the University of Western Ontario. Today I want to talk about my paper titled Thomas Reid and the Priority Thesis: A Defence Against Turri. So to dive in, my aim is to defend Thomas Reid's priority thesis from a criticism offered by John Turri in his paper titled read on the priority of natural language. reads priority thesis claims that artificial language could never have been invented if there were not a natural language first. Language on Reids account consists of all those signs which humans use in order to communicate. Reid tells us that signs are those things that give rise to thoughts or otherwise indicate other entities to our minds, where our capacity to understand that which is signified by certain signs sometimes cultivated through experience. In other cases, this capacity may be what Reid calls a principle of our own nature. The signs which constitute human language are divided into two sorts. Were natural language consists of those natural signs whose meanings are universally and inherently understood by all

persons by a print principle of their nature. For example, a smile signifying happiness or pointing signifying attention to whatever is pointed at. Artificial language consists of those artificial signs which have no meaning outside of what is agreed upon by those who use them. An example of an artificial sign within language might be the word cat signifying a cat. After spelling out the sorts of signs that constitute language read offers his arguments for the priority pieces, he writes, and I quote, it is demonstrable, that if mankind had not a natural language, they could never have invented an artificial one by the reason and ingenuity. All artificial language supposes some contract or agreement to affixed certain meaning to certain signs. Therefore, there must be contracts and agreements before the use of artificial signs. But there can be no contract or agreement without signs nor without language. And therefore there must be a natural language before any artificial language can be invented, which was to be demonstrated, end quote, my objection against Turri's criticism ultimately takes root and what I believe to be in elicited interpretive conflation between signs generally in signs within a language. In his formulation of Reid's argument and his objection against it. In my view, Turri takes a few of the premises out of context and as such, it's a couple crucial features of Reid's views. We must pay attention to language that Reid employed in his argument and the precise formulation of the thesis itself. What was to be demonstrated in Reid's own words is that natural language is necessary for the invention of artificial language. In Turri's formulation, in addition to the counter example that he later provides Reid's repeated mention of artificial languages dependence upon natural language has done away with instead Turri talks about artificial signs dependence upon natural signs. Turns objection, consistent taking some imagined individual named Wally to describe decide to use the word wolves to refer to wolves that lurk nearby. While we also know that the meaning of wolves is not determined by a principle of our own nature. He claims rightfully that the invention of this artificial sign did not require a prior contract or agreement formed on the basis of natural signs. Therefore, he concludes the invention of artificial language does not depend upon natural language and the priority thesis is false. The problem is that Reid never claims at the invention of artificial signs full stop depends upon contracts or agreements. Rather only that the invention of artificial signs within a language require contracts or agreements formed through the use of natural signs within natural language. This is just to say that Turri's count fails to acknowledge the conceptual division between artificial science within a language in artificial signs' generally. The larger context in which reads remarks are situated makes this clear. He writes that signs within a language are of two sorts in concerning those which constitute artificial language, they have no meaning but what is affixed them by contract or agreement among those who use them. By his definition, therefore, an artificial sign is one that is destitute of meaning in a language until a meeting is settled upon through contracts or agreements between language user's. The reference of such signs in his division of artificial and natural signs are those that are made of made use of language. So an artificial sign generally might differ from an

artificial sign within artificial language insofar as meaningless in a language. An artificial sign becomes a piece of artificial language if and only if a common meaning is affixed to it by contracts and agreements. So Turri's counterexample succeeds only insofar as it attacks the possible invention of general artificial science. Those which do not require contracts and agreements and as such are not pieces of artificial language. To invent a piece of artificial language is by definition to collectively settle upon a common signification for a given artificial sign. Inventing a general artificial sign does not bear this requirement. Given this we can accept that Turri's objection is true, but its truth doesn't threaten reach priority thesis because not a component of Reid's actual argument. But biggest worry or rather weakness in my defense. seems to me to be a matter of how to go about formalizing and interpreting Reid's argument for the priority thesis. Though I'm confident that Turri's formalization misses the importance of Reid's emphasis on language more narrowly than signs generally, I nevertheless think that there's room to argue how exactly Reid goes about actually arguing for the priority thesis. And if I'm actually successful in providing insight to that project.



Lewis Powell 07:27

Comment on Benjamin Formanek Thomas Reid and the priority thesis, by Lewis Powell. Formanek's main concern about Turri's argument is that he's not paying attention to this distinction between how signs work in general and how they work in the context of a language. Within a language Reid requires that the users all agree on how the signs work, there needs to be a contract or an agreement. Now Turri can push back and say, I don't understand why does Reid get to set that standard? It shouldn't just be about whether there's sufficient coordination for the language to work. Shouldn't it just be about whether there's enough coordination among the users that the communication is successful. How can Reid get to complain? Neither Formanek nor Turri look at Reid's discussion of compacts and agreements and contracts in the essays in the act of powers. But if you do, it becomes clear that what's very important to Reid is this idea that social operations of mind specifically those involved in communication and contracts are fundamentally irreducible. You can't reduce the social to the solitary. There's a quote here that I'm not going to read all of because I only have two minutes. But in that, quote, the very end Reid decries the tendency among philosophers to try and reduce the social operations to the solitary which is the sort of thing that Turri is trying to do in his paper. Now, the EAP discussion of complex and contracts contains not only an extended discussion of the solitary social distinction for active mind, but also the nature of language including an additional presentation of this priority argument that's under discussion. And so the point of my comments and criticism is to show that focusing on Reid's stance about the irreducibility of social acts of mind can clarify what's going on in the dispute between Turri and Reid/Formanek. What's at stake is not just the definition of language and whether we

should include this compact agreement condition, but whether we can really establish genuine communication via any fundamentally solitary methods. So I think that's what's at stake and focusing on EAP passages would really help us illuminate what's going on between Formanek and Turri. Thank you.

K

Kenneth Pearce 09:39

All right. Thanks, guys. So first, I'd like to give Benjamin a chance to respond to Lewis's comments. Go ahead.

B

Benjamin Formanek 09:48

Thanks, Alastair. Yeah, Lewis, thank you very much for your comments. Honestly, I've had a ball thinking about this. Unfortunately, I got to preface by saying I have no forthcoming answer to what you deemed to be the heart of the issue. issue here. Nevertheless, this is something again with your help and an article that you pointed in my direction to continue thinking about this. That said, though, towards my reply, I take it that Powell's primary critical comment is that in my account as well as Turri's misses or rather obscures the real thrust of what is crucially at stake for Reid, and that is the irreducibly social mental operations and if he can help himself to that. So while my arguments against Turri, Turricounts center on how we ought to understand Reid's definition of language to the end, to the end that doing so deflects Turri's attack. Powell says that reads account of irreducibly social acts of mind helps to clarify the dispute between us that is unpacking Reid's account of solitary versus social acts of mind and gets to the heart of what Trey and I are really disagreeing over. So I think that Poewll's providing an illuminating and deeply helpful point of consideration in his written comments, he also writes that he does not wish to way into the disagreement. I'll start by saying that I don't disagree with policy suggesting that Reid's talk of compacts, contracts and agreements in the essays brings to the fore the importance of the work that social and solitary acts in mind are supposed to do for the for his account of language. Indeed, I think he self appointed a more pointed finger on the dispute, but I nevertheless think that these notions sit comparatively more comfortably or cozily with myself and Turri's textually at the very least. My interpretation puts heavy stock into the definition of artificial language, which as Reid says supposes and I quote, some compacts and agreements to affix a certain meaning to certain signs. So I tried to argue, Turri counter examples simply don't really play ball with Reed's definitions. It seems to me that Powell's comments fortify Reid's motivations for giving such a definition one which I think Turri's accountant collects. So if it is the case Powell states that Turri's interpretation bootstraps inner social science systems to purely solitary uses of science in purely mental operations. And more Moreover, that this is a mistake, I have trouble seeing why the dispute is a difficult one to resolve. If we have reason to think

that we ought not Reid, Reid as endorsing solitary uses of language, or in endorsing solitary use of signs within a language Turri's account, again, seems to start from the wrong lane. Whether Reid has successfully argued that the social is not reducible to the solitary is indeed I agree, a difficult question to address which unfortunately, again, I have no forthcoming answer to, but it is nevertheless what he says. My paper as Powell's rightfully points out, focuses narrowly on Reid's definitions, it sets up exculpate read, from Turri's counterexamples by means of a definitional clarification. That said though, so I guess that's my immediate word. response. But I'm still curious to hear what Powell has to say with respect to whether or not I have succeeded in that project. And moreover, if he too thinks that the definitional clarification I provided can accommodate Reid's discussion of irreducibly social acts of mind in the essays that he helpfully pointed out. And I suppose lastly, I'm just really curious to hear if Powell has any immediate intuitions about the heart of the dispute that is answering it, whether Reid offers a convincing argument in the EAP to the end that we cannot construct coordinated linguistic science systems without pre-existing underlying irreducible social operations of mine. Thank you.



Alastair Crosby 13:41

So Louis, do you want to respond?



Lewis Powell 13:44

Oh, yeah, sure. So um, so part of that it sounded like you thought I might have been skeptical about whether you were getting Reid right on like the interpretive element and there, no, I think you I think you are solidly getting the, this sort of, I guess, like the Reid interpretive question right? on that front, so like, I wasn't meaning to challenge, whether you were interpreting Reids sort of overall stance correctly. I was merely punting on the question of whether reid is correct about the irreducible sociability of our linguistic communication systems or whether it's possible to bootstrap social communication systems that have fundamentally solitary mental acts on which I took to be the thing that you and Turri fundamentally disagreeing about I took it that his challenges are he's, he's thinking, Reids argue, read takes himself to establish that you can't do that, even though he wasn't arguing in that in those terms. And so he's giving a bunch of counter examples that were based on that premise. And you were sort of pushing back against that by pointing out that that Reid had an argument that sort of starts from that premise. And then I was saying, by bringing that to the forefront, it makes it clearer where you guys are disagreeing. And then I was saying like, I don't know how to settle, which of you is getting it right on the facts on the ground. But certainly you and Reid are pushing back on the fundamental sociality of language. And then he was using a bunch of examples that are sort of rejecting

B

Benjamin Formanek 15:29

Yeah, right. Yeah, thank you.

A

Alastair Crosby 15:33

All right. Um, there's no questions in the queue yet. So I'd like to insert my take on some of the things we've been talking about here with respect to Reid's use. I think first it helps to think a little more deeply concerning what Reids accountant agreement is, specifically as it gives it in this chapter. Reid takes an agreement to be; for two people to agree is for them to make promises to each other. Yep, where the act of making a promise is to take on an obligation, a premier fashion obligation, one that can be maybe, you know, canceled by, by countervailing reasons, but you take on an obligation to another person to do a thing. If this is the notion of agreement, which Reid is appealing to when he says that artificial linguistic signs are established by an agreement among the members of the linguistic community, what is he's, he's saying there's something like, sort of a linguistic contract, right, in which we collectively establish norms that govern the use of words. Right. This, this is what I really think is going on here and it must be because if you think about the larger point Reid is trying to make and these two chapters from the essays on the act of powers is he's trying to argue contrary Hume that the nature of the obligations that we have, From promising or not mere sort of, they don't hold merely in virtue of some kind of artificial conviction or a construct. Right? The arguments he's making, he needs to be appealing to this notion of agreement, this robust normative notion agreement when talking about language, right? And then his argument for the priority argument as I read it, he goes and look, agreements in that sense cannot be made without communication. Communication requires signs so we need to have some kind of signs in order to establish these kind of robust normative connections at all I might be wrong about that, but that's what I take him to be saying. Right. Um and so there was another question you guys raised. So why can't he bootstrap? Why can't solitary activities get us to this kind of thing? Why is the social irreducible of solitary? Well, I think Reid actually answers this later in this chapter when he explains what he thinks is wrong with Hume's account, a promising. Promising he says look, promising can't just be an act, where we express a certain set of solitary operations, a certain intention to do something in here appropriate sort of context, because merely expressing an intention doesn't establish the kind of obligations that is consistent with the essence of promise. Right. And he, when he when he talks about why giving testimony can't really be expressed, reducing your judgment in the chapter on the intellectual powers, again, he emphasizes that the normative can't be reduced to the solitary in that way. So that's what I see is at the crux for Reid of why the social can't be reduced to the solitary. And that's what I think is really deeply grounding this argument. Right. So that's my take. I mean, I'd ask both of you guys to respond to what you think about that.

B

Benjamin Formanek 18:55

Yeah, if I could. So firstly, I think Lewis says so much in his comments, his written comments kind of kind of get at this super super pointedly. But nevertheless, I mean, despite the way in which you were elucidating agreement, Alistair, and if you were pointing at the same chapter in EAP I'm still curious. So I'm actually looking at Lewis's written comments here. And this is the bottom of the first page, actually. So in his reconstruction, which I deeply appreciate of Reid's priority thesis, he kind of calls into question how, like how where we're supposed to set the bar for compacts and agreements or for this conversation, just agreements, whether that's supposed to amount to that we're just using some terms in some similar way. And if that's like the low bar, or the high bar, having some sort of like really, really intermingled, like a mental kind of resembles something like that. I guess that to me is like what I'm really curious about, I suppose that I need to do a lot more looking here and that I'm I don't know, I don't have a forthcoming answer. So any insight would be appreciated there.

A

Alastair Crosby 20:11

Louis, do you have anything to say I have some thoughts on that. But I, you should go ahead and shoot as...

L

Lewis Powell 20:16

well. So I'm in an earlier chapter in the EAP. Reid gives an example that the object of a command is an action of somebody else's. And one of the things that carries over from the essays on the intellectual powers is that Reid tends to try and individually different mental operations by the category of intentional objects they have. So memory is distinct from perception because perceptions have present objects and memories have past objects. That doesn't mean that everything you remember can't exist in the present. It just means it has to be something that was around in the past. So you can remember a tree that still exists, but it has to have been a tree that's from the past; and so that's a lot of work to be doing with the, like just the nature of the object. But that's in part because he rejects ideas and mental content to be doing that work in a lot of places. And so part of what makes the social operations of the mind social is that they essentially have other involving objects as I can have hopes that involve other people, but some of my hopes don't have to involve other people. So hope is not a fundamentally social operation. But commands are because I can't command unless I am committed to and believe that there is another person and that they will have an action because the object of a command is another person's action. Even whether or not this is like a weirdly [...] thing or whatever, even if the other person doesn't do the action that's still the object of the command. So um, however we cash out the the like, intentional object of the promise or whatever the

agreement is has to be the sort of thing where I am related to through the agreement, another individual and I have to be cognizing it as another individual and stuff. And so that's I think, where, even if it's something as simple as pointing, and so even so like, for me a lot of the action, or some of the action in like the back and forth with Turri would even get down to the nitty gritty details of like the wolf case, is like if I'm pointing at a wolf to indicate that so I'm thinking that that's what I'm thinking of when I say Wolf, I think Reid my pushback and say, Well, if you're pointing, pointing only make sense as an action to do if you are cognizing, someone at the other end of that act of communication, as the recipient of address there or what have you. And so, that like I think, when you start breaking down and categorizing all of the mental operations there, if any of them are not incidentally social and having an object that is another person, Reid's gonna say that's a social operation of mind. And so I've got some irreducible sociality there. And that's like, that's why pointing the natural language of humankind pointing. And if not, so that's that's how that's how I sort of I dive into it is thinking about, like, the structure of the mental states. Um, and that's where I think a lot of the action is. But I, so I don't know, I may have lost track of what I was answering there. But I...

A

Alastair Crosby 23:36

I think it has to do with the Why does he think the social is irreducible to the solitary flip this question now?

L

Lewis Powell 23:43

Yeah. Oh, so and so sorry. And so I think for Reid I think a large part of that is because for Reid mental operations are fundamentally relational and not mental states. And so because you have an operation, subject and object, the social ones are fundamentally socially irreducibly social because you don't have anything short of subject, act and object that you can circle and say, well, that's the whole thing. Unlike someone like Locke, where you could be like, we've got the person, you've got their idea, and you've got the operation. And even if it doesn't get all the way to an external object, you've still got a whole state there that you could like, put a lasso around and say that's it. And so for the indirect realists, you've got an internal intrinsic state, you could circle but for someone like Reid the whole thing, in order to get an entire state, you need the external object, which includes another entity who is external to you and therefore social. Mm hmm.

B

Benjamin Formanek 24:48

Yeah, I mean, that's that's helpful. Alastair. Did you want to follow up to that?

A

Alastair Crosby 24:53

Um, I mean, I could. I mean, I mean, yeah, I mean, I agree with everything you said. I don't know if that's the whole story for Reid a lot of that sounds like exposing what his view is not cashing out why he believes it. I mean, I sometimes I know this is an acronym stick and it it'll tear out the hearts of all the historians in the room. But it is sometimes useful to compare Reid's kind of social operations to some divisions and contemporary speech act theory. Right. So, Reid's examples of social operations include requesting, promising testifying, the kinds of actions that you know, Austinian's are going to call illocutionary acts right. Um, and there's a couple different there's one particular way I want to highlight that some contemporary theorists think about illocutionary acts. They say, Oh, well, okay, here's my analysis of what it is when I perform illocutionary act acts. Well, I have a certain set of beliefs, intentions and desires some complex set. A lot of those beliefs will be beliefs about my environment, beliefs about other people in my environment and things like this. So they're all other involving incense. And what it is perform the illocutionary Act or the social operation returns, just is to have those beliefs, intentions and desires in the appropriate sort of environmental or social environmental context. Right. I don't take that to be Reid's view. Because when Reid says the social operations are just as simple and are irreducible to the solitary, he's going to resist any urge to analyze social operations in terms of some kind of complex state of solitary operations just just happens to be manifested in a certain particular sort of environmental context. Right. Um, and the question is, why? And there's not a lot of textual evidence on that. Um, the only two cases he discusses in detail are promises In the chapter that we're talking about, but on the nature of the contract, and then at the first chapter in the essay on Judgment where he contrasts testimony with your judgment, right, so he draws a contrast between giving testimony that p, which is kind of like, well, we'll get into that. But he just says that's not just expressing your belief or judgment that people giving testimony, something else. It's something more akin to giving somebody else wants assurance that p is true, as opposed to merely expressing one's judgment. Right. And in both the promising case in the judgment case, so in the judgment cases as well, here's the difference. Here's the difference in really expressing your judgment and giving testimony. If you give false testimony, you lied. You did something wrong. Whereas when you express a false judgment, oh, that was just a mistake. Right? There's some kind of there's this normative character, certain kinds of obligations one takes on when performed social operations, that one doesn't take on when merely giving expression to solitary operations in particular contexts. Similarly, in promising he goes, look, I can express my intention to pick you up at the airport. But that doesn't involve taking on an obligation. Right? That's different from promising you can analyze promising as an expression of intentions. Promising is essentially normative involves taking on an obligation, and I don't and sort of social obligations, obligations to other people. Right. And I, what I suspect is that Reid things look, no activity I could perform in solitude, which is the definition of the solitary

operations as opposed to the social is the kind of operation that could essentially be me taking on obligations to other people that they could hold me to account for.

- B** Benjamin Formanek 28:48
Yeah, you might Mind if I jump in right there. Yeah. That provided we don't have any other hands raised. I don't think we do.
- A** Alastair Crosby 28:54
I'm keeping an eye. I don't
- L** Lewis Powell 28:56
Somebody has a thumb. I don't know if that is anything that's been there for a while.
While
- A** Alastair Crosby 29:03
I think that's a yay for things,
- B** Benjamin Formanek 29:05
okay, great. Yeah, so I mean, correct me if I'm wrong, it doesn't seem like we want to saddle Reid with the view that his his account of compacts, and agreements or contracts, all three of which are underwritten by being promises, right of the sort of normative sort that you're suggesting. Is that what you want to say?
- K** Kenneth Pearce 29:28
Um, so in the chapter in the act of powers, he says, I use these words synonymously. Before he goes on to give to later arguments. He says, For my purposes, these mean the same thing, it's a two sided promise. And then he argues we have a natural faculty for making these sorts of promises. And his argument just is the priority argument were discussing in that chapter. So yeah, I do. I do want to make that that attribution to Reid. Okay.
- B** Benjamin Formanek 29:55
Yeah. Oh, so if I can backtrack a bit So I wonder, I wonder about, imagine the following

case. Right. So we, I want to wonder about in virtue of what is there a failure in my social act of mind, when I request to a non English speaker, hey, pick up my cat just utter the words, you know, no pointing no apparent natural signs that I'm exuding or whatever, that they could pick up from my demeanor in virtue of what is it that my social act of mind fails to have something as its object properly? Or like in virtue of what is my, my, my utterance? They're not successful? If it's not the fact that there was no compact and agreement made.

K Kenneth Pearce 30:44
Right, so So can you describe the case again, where the act fails to come off?

B Benjamin Formanek 30:49
That's right. Well, I mean, presumably it does. So if I'm, if my cat is walking around and randomly there is some non English speaker that walks in my door and I just sit, sit quiet. And say pick up my cat.

A Alastair Crosby 31:01
Yeah.

K Kenneth Pearce 31:03
So you give a command? You give a command or you tried to give a command?

B Benjamin Formanek 31:07
That's exactly right. Yeah.

A Alastair Crosby 31:09
Well, we would say you didn't successfully give the command because it's a known condition. Yeah.

B Benjamin Formanek 31:15
No, right. I mean, I, I get that much...

A Alastair Crosby 31:19
because you're not appropriately related to the other person. And because they don't understand you.

B Benjamin Formanek 31:24
Yeah. Right. In order for them to understand me, though, regardless, we need to have made these these these normative promises through the compacts and agreements, so understood, or what's the idea...

A Alastair Crosby 31:36
We need? We need an art we need a language capable of giving expression to the social operations so that you can be understood so that you can complete the act

K Kenneth Pearce 31:45
right? Now. No, I agree. So what's perplexing with me for Reid is like, wait a minute, what do we actually need to communicate? Isn't it just a coordinated uses of signs? Do we really need to establish norms that govern the use of words? Is that the kind of issue you're raising? Yeah, that's right. That's right. Yeah, good question. Yeah. Um, so I think when you go into Reid's action theory, to be a genuine agent to be a genuine, efficient cause, one needs to be possessed of what he calls moral agency. And so for us to genuinely be the efficient causes that established an ordinary or orderly uses of signs in a community, I think, I think there's some some material there, which could maybe close that gap for him. But, but I'm not going to try to expose it out right now, because it's not very clear in my head. But I think there is stuff to think about there. But I agree. I think that's one really good repause to Reid is to say like, wait a minute. We don't need agreements in that sense. We just need to somehow coordinate?

B Benjamin Formanek 32:50
Yeah, this is something that Lewis was saying too.

A Alastair Crosby 32:51
So

K

Kenneth Pearce 32:52

maybe Reid's argument works when you define artificial language that way. Meaning is established by agreements and agreements require the Use of signs because there was no agreement. Maybe? Yeah, um, yeah, I think the other way to push back on Reid is to say, well, isn't there such a thing as like an implied or implicit agreement? Like? Do we always need to give explicit expression using signs? You know what?

B

Benjamin Formanek 33:18

I mean kinds of things. All sorry, quickly. How else could there be agreement without some requisite sorts of signs, whether...

K

Kenneth Pearce 33:25

it could be it could be implied or implicated integrating sense, right? So a lot of the things we say and communicate to each other, we don't actually explicitly spell it out in the semantics of the terms really, a lot of times we sort of rely on people around us to use their ability to reason in order to understand what we're getting at. And so the thing is, well, I don't actually use signs whose semantic content is social oration, so why not? I mean, I think that's another way to attack Reid's argument.

L

Lewis Powell 33:55

You have to be careful there because so for Reid the natural language humanity includes facial expressions, tone of voice, laughter, body language, right and like pointing. And so the sorts of cases that you need to try and push back against Reid would either be denying that those things count as natural language by his definition, or you need something that's like full on David Lewis in convention or, like, you need to say that none of that stuff is going on in Turri cases or you need like Humes rowboat with two people rowing, but they're giving each other any body language indication that they're doing it together. You just need to be like, well, I noticed that he's rowing, but I don't think he noticed that I'm rowing I just want to row better. So I'm rowing at the same time, but with language, right, like he said the word Wolf and it's helpful if I say this word wolf at the same time, but I'm not doing it in a way where I'm paying attention to how he said the word wolf or that he smiled when I said the word wolf. Like, you need to try and find a way to strip out all the stuff that he's counting as natural language and still get coordination on the scope of like, full range linguistic coordination. Yeah.

B

Benjamin Formanek 35:13

Yeah, that's really helpful. Thank you. Yeah.

K

Kenneth Pearce 35:15

Um, yeah, I guess I kind of have Reid making a stronger claim in the argument and why I think that's a problem for him, right? I take Reid's claim to be if we had not a natural language for expressing the social operation of agreement, in the sense of a two sided promise, then we couldn't have invented artificial language. So so maybe we have all bunch of other kinds of natural language, but we don't have natural language for that. Right? And then you go like, really couldn't we've like even if we had a natural language for expressing the solitary operations just not the social couldn't we have somehow coordinator use of signs and isn't that just what languages like English are is the really the simplest normative no constraints on our uses of words. I guess I take the problem I'm pushing with

A

Alastair Crosby 36:03

Reids argument is something that derives from the fact I read them to me making a very particular kind of claim. Right? We should, Kenny Pierce has a question. So we should go to Kenny Pearce.

K

Kenneth Pearce 36:15

Hey, um, so it's been a real long time since I read these texts. So somebody here has been looking at them more recently may just correct me. But the last time I was looking at this, I thought maybe Reid was saying something more extreme in his account of social operations than we've been saying so far. And this is supported, I think, by the long quotation in Lewis's comments. Um, that is the the social operations. It's not just an operation that is performed by a mind that requires it to suppose that other minds exist, is an operation performed jointly by multiple minds. And so then he's called claiming that those social operations can't be given a reductive analysis into the solitary operations. And if that's true, and if it's also true that the social operations require that the minds achieve some kind of meeting, you know, whereby the content of one is conveyed to the other, then there just isn't any hope. Right? Unless there's some kind of way of achieving that meeting of minds. That is a primitive principle of human nature, then there just isn't any hope that there would ever be any social operations of mind. Um, so if Reid is if Reids view about the social operations is that extreme and kind of metaphysically weird, right, that we can't reduce what's going on and promising to the individual things happening in each mind? But if that's actually a view that it seems like it's really hard to

get out of the argument in the noise Yeah.

A

Alastair Crosby 38:00

I mean, I think Reid's view is as extreme. Do you guys have thoughts on that?

B

Benjamin Formanek 38:05

Um, just quickly if I can follow up to Kenny. So you're looking at that blockquote on the second page of, of Powell's comments, correct? The starting with if nature had not made man capable.

K

Kenneth Pearce 38:19

Right? Right.

B

Benjamin Formanek 38:20

Yeah, thank you. I'm actually, I'm not disagreeing with your interpretation. But specifically in this, if you pointed out I'm actually having difficulty regardless, seeing how they're you might draw out that kind of metaphysical interpretation of this link between mines and that sort of way. So, yeah, I suppose that's all that's my only follow up to that.

K

Kenneth Pearce 38:43

So it's just that I already thought that about Reid. And then when I look at looked at this text, it made a lot of sense in light of that, as I say, because the thing that he's arguing here is that we can't give an account of the social operations in terms of the solitary operations Right, if if there was just what's happening in each mind, where each mind was, would be performing some solitary operations, and they somehow get coordinated, and that gives rise to the social operations. That picture would be inconsistent with what Reid says here. Right? Yeah. It could maybe also be interpreted in an in between way, where there are some where social operation happens in one mind alone, but requires it to believe that there's another mind or something like that. Yeah. Right. But but it does. I think kind of when I read this text, it sort of made a lot of sense in light of the interpretation I was already supposed to. Yeah, I don't necessarily mean that it distinguish it from that other modern interpretation. Okay.

B Benjamin Formanek 39:46
Um, okay. Lewis, please.

L Lewis Powell 39:47
Just quickly. Um, so, Ruth Berger has work in progress on this topic. By you'd have to reach out to her directly because it's the draft I had was not for circulation. So I can't I have to don't want to talk too much about it because it was a not for quotation, you know, draph, but, um, probably she'd be happy to share whenever there is a draft, it's shareable with people. But I think I have a narrower interpretation on than other people do. That just ties into what I was saying earlier about the object being essentially second personal of it. And so it being fundamentally social in that way. And I don't want to take up too much time with that. But if you want to talk later, Kenny about where we disagree on the interpretation of this passage, or more broadly, let me know.

B Benjamin Formanek 40:41
So sorry, Lewis, what is that to say that you would adopt what Kenny dub the more moderate interpretation of the social acts of mine?

L Lewis Powell 40:50
Um, I think it might be slightly less moderate than precisely what Kenny said, but i think i think it might be Be that, for them to be successful in a certain sense, it entails the existence of others.

B Benjamin Formanek 41:06
That's right. Yeah. Um,

L Lewis Powell 41:07
But not, but not that they are. It does not entail the existence of like the reciprocal act in mind and be like, it's, it's not like a dual act, which is what it sounded like he was saying. The like, it's not like a multi person act of mind.

K Kenneth Pearce 41:30
Right? So Reid does say that the acts, and I quote, cannot exist in this expressed unknown

to another person. So that lends itself to the rather extreme reading, right? It's not like I can perform it on my own, but it only actually works or comes off or succeeds. And so far as it's expressing them to another person, he says it cannot exist. Now, maybe we aren't going to take them. So literally on that, but I think the extreme reading has the virtue of being able to take six literally.

B

Benjamin Formanek 42:05

I don't disagree. In fact, it's really creative. I never would have interpreted it in the way that you might be suggesting now, Alastair, you prior Kenny, what do you call the moderator? The one that Lewis just expressed in other ways, the way that I had been reading it. Now to that passage specifically, Alastair, you might actually just reading it back quickly, one more time.

K

Kenneth Pearce 42:25

Sure. I'm going to go to the one at the start of the [...] intellect intellectual powers. I just did it from memory right there, so I'll have to go find it.

A

Alastair Crosby 42:35

I'm gonna go to the passage.

B

Benjamin Formanek 42:50

That's fine. No worries. I mean, the point was that it's necessary on Reids account that there is a recipient mind or rather that there is a mind that knows that act. Is that right?

K

Kenneth Pearce 43:00

Seems to be what he's saying. Right? So here we go. Um I call those operations social which necessarily imply social intercourse with some other intelligent being who bears apart and bla bla bla bla bla. Um, so between the operations of the mind which for wanting a proper name, I've called solitary and those I called social, there's this very remarkable distinction that in the solitary the expression of them by words or their sensible sign is accidental, they may exist without being expressed without being known to another person. But in the social operations, the expression is essential. They cannot exist without being expressed by words or signs unknown to the other person. Okay, so right, thank you. That's the passage.

- B** Benjamin Formanek 43:48
Yeah. So I guess, I guess then we might not necessarily quibble, but just inquire about like what that that constitution in that context of known is, right. I mean, is it something that needs to be taken back and manifest and other signs from the recipient, you know, recipient mind.
- A** Alastair Crosby 44:05
Okay,
- K** Kenneth Pearce 44:05
so So I mean, I take into the saying there that like some thing needs to be done on the part of the other person. I'm in the cases of agreeing it's obviously both people have to perform a reciprocal social lives. Whether that reciprocal social act, Is that necessary condition for all social operations, the mind or merely some I don't know, I don't know if the text is clear on that. He certainly thinks there's some cases where they are.
- B** Benjamin Formanek 44:31
Yeah, so I mean, in like, just like the most loose kind of understanding of his use of the word know or known in this passage, say in that instance, that I had brought up other than a hypothetical non English speaker in my apartment, and I command pick up my cat, if we're supposed to read known in this more robust sense, I might not even that is more robust sense being the one that you know, you were kind of gesturing and as well as going Kenny, despite the fact that my act failed, I mean, because there's like no relevant features or demeanor that I can pick up on from, you know, the, the end of my language. It doesn't seem like they knew flat out that I was performing a social act...
- A** Alastair Crosby 45:16
So,
- K** Kenneth Pearce 45:17
in that case, in that case, I think he'd say you performed the act of making the sounds. And you very much intended to perform the social act, those expert performed, but you didn't perform the social act.

B Benjamin Formanek 45:29
But...

K Kenneth Pearce 45:30
Sorry, if I can jump back in for just a second. It's a very common view in like normative literature and political philosophy and stuff in the 17th and 18th centuries, to suppose that a command or a law just doesn't exist if it hasn't been effectively promulgated. Right, because you haven't given a command a real command unless you've succeeded in creating an obligation for someone and they can't have an obligation without knowing that they've been command. So if you actually think that commanding is a primitive act of the mind that can't be analyzed into solitary acts,

A Alastair Crosby 46:09
that's a crazy idea.

K Kenneth Pearce 46:11
Again, unless someone has understood that you have made a command, and you really have, he says, in this passage, we're just saying from EAP, it presupposes society with other beings. So the right prior social relations that give you authority have to be in place, and then the person has to understand you to be making a command. And if all of that doesn't happen, then the command doesn't exist. Yeah.

B Benjamin Formanek 46:35
Yeah.

K Kenneth Pearce 46:37
It's interesting, right? I mean, other people, like if you look at what other people in the time are saying to some people talk about the psychology involved in making a promise. And usually they're saying a certain kind of thing. They're saying, Well, you know, they're saying basically what our intention was and contemporary speech act theory say, what you do when you make a promise is you have an expression to some beliefs, intentions and desires. The appropriate sort of context. Right, and that's just what performing the act is. What's crazy about Reid's view is he's insisting that no, it's not just to give expression to solitary operations in a proper context it's simply irreducible. Now some conventional is

like Austin say that too. But then Reid says, and we have a natural faculty for this Austin's not gonna say that Austin gonna say no, no, we don't have this innate natural fact of performing social operations, right? It's there's exists social conventions, which we then exploit like illocutionary acts for Austin are like saying, I hereby pronounce you man and wife, right, there has to be the social institutions of marriage and holding the Office of the officiant and all these other things to do it. Reid saying, No, we can perform these operations like prior to any artificial conventions existing at all. And it's not just to express beliefs, intentions and desires. There's this fundamentally other fundamentally distinct irreducible involving activity that we engage in prior to any artificial conventions of any sort. That's, I think, the view. And...

B

Benjamin Formanek 48:11

Can I follow up real quick. Yeah, just to make something abundantly clear to spell it out as broadly as possible. So, actually, I'm gonna ask this in the form of a question, my failing to perform a social act of mind with a non English speaker in my apartment who I thought was commanding to open, or excuse me pick up my cat that failed in virtue of what fact sorry, it failed to be a social act of mine in virtue of what fact? The fact that it just wasn't one because it was solitary or in virtue of the fact that she didn't understand because we didn't have agreement.

K

Kenneth Pearce 48:49

One of the necessary conditions for the possibility to perform the Act was not satisfied, namely that it was known to another indulgent being. We'll see. It's like I can't hit somebody if like I don't make contact with; so you can swing my fist, but I didn't perform the act of hitting.

B

Benjamin Formanek 49:05

That seems circular to me, though.

A

Alastair Crosby 49:07

In what sence?

B

Benjamin Formanek 49:07

Because I thought these are supposed to be [...]. So I mean, there are clearly constituents of what makes this social active social act, right, one of which is necessarily solitary in a

certain way isn't up.

A Alastair Crosby 49:19
Oh, so

K Kenneth Pearce 49:20
so like the act of sort of like making the sounds, I promise, that's not a social act. I can make the sounds all alone in a room. And I must make those sounds in order to perform the further act of promising but he says, I think he just says what's involved in promising is not reducible to those solitary operations. It can't be I completely analyzed away in terms of right now. Okay. It'd be if I could just ask a question in connection with this. And I'd be interested to know, this may be slightly tangential, but it might help to clarify things I'd be interested to know if anyone knows about, about Reid's political views, because it's kind of a standard talking point of Tory thinkers Astell, Berkeley, Burke, that there isn't this like, state of nature where everybody can come together and agree, instead humans are have always been socially situated. Right? And the sort of positions the relations of authority and social connection and so forth are part of the, like, fundamental God given constitution of the human condition. Um, so if, if Reid had that kind of view, and given also that a lot of his examples of social acts are acts that create various normative statuses,

L Lewis Powell 50:50
hmm, um,

K Kenneth Pearce 50:52
then that that kind of background of that political theory could maybe be illuminating here.

B Benjamin Formanek 50:57
Yep, yeah.

K Kenneth Pearce 51:01
Yeah, um, he doesn't write much on it in the published texts, right. But the Edinburgh additions do have volumes on it, Reid on society and politics, Reid on practical ethics has a bit to go in there. Um, but also I mean just the chapter we're looking at in the EAP. Right,

like Reid is concerned to critique Hume on questions concerning social contracts. Right. I mean, and it follows a chapter he's critiquing Reid on, like, Justice is not an artificial virtue. That's his big picture point. He's saying no, no, the sense of when Hume argues that justice is not an artificial virtue. He's wrong. And is that and his argument for why he's wrong is you've misunderstood the nature of language, buddy and these social operations, like that's the broader context in which this argument is being given. So yeah, I mean, it definitely goes Next up to the political philosophy. And that's why I was saying earlier, I'm inclined to read Reid's point as being look. The notion of agreement involved here is this robustly normative one, it's not merely coordinating our use of signs. That because in the broader context in which he's making this argument EAP, he has to be making that kind of point because he's particularly Humes account of justice as artificial virtue? He's saying it's a natural virtue. We have this natural faculty by which we're able to perform these kinds of obligation taking on x. And you know why we have to have that kind of thing, because we wouldn't have been able to make language if we didn't. That's that's the simple way to run down what Reids big picture argument in that chapter is, yeah, it's deeply political. Interestingly, there is a, Reid does write on the nature of an implied or unexpressed promise or contract and some of the manuscripts and that might throw a wrench in that might be I don't know how he reconciles that with this view, but he does it. It's in the Reid on practical ethics volume. Anybody else? I don't want to monopolize things.

B

Benjamin Formanek 53:09

Oh, no, no, no, I'm not here. I appreciate it.

A

Alastair Crosby 53:13

I'm a Reid nerds. Alright, um, I guess I'm sharing. So any other questions from the group other than Lewis Kenny, Ben, me the people who've read read and enjoyed it. Okay, um, and that's it unless Has anybody has anything else? I guess...

B

Benjamin Formanek 53:40

I have just one more thing to say no. I especially wanted to thank Lewis for his comments and pointing me in the right direction with some of these quotes and then also the the route bucker work. So yeah, thank you for that. I've got a lot to think about. This has been exciting in both to you Alastair and Kenny for participating and talking about some more. I appreciate

K Kenneth Pearce 54:01
that cool company verse a forthcoming paper too.

B Benjamin Formanek 54:04
Oh, yeah. Yeah. Okay.

A Alastair Crosby 54:06
And I got hundreds of pages of stuff on Reid on language.

B Benjamin Formanek 54:10
I know. I know. Yeah. Thanks everyone.

K Kenneth Pearce 54:14
Right. So I guess Ben wants to say a few words to finish off today.

B Benjamin Hill 54:19
No, I just want to say, thanks, everybody and remind everybody that, again, you can add questions to the webpage to the comments. And continue this. And we'll be convenient again tomorrow to the entirely devoted the Berkeley. It's the Ohio State Barkley workshop that we'll be doing tomorrow. So please join us for that. I think it starts at 11am pacific time. So So most of us get to sleep in even if you're on the west coast, and we'll see everyone tomorrow. Thanks, everybody.