

PHIL 4233: Philosophy of Language
Prof. Funkhouser
Grice, "Meaning"

- Grice distinguishes natural and nonnatural senses of 'meaning'.

Natural meaning : E.g., "These tracks mean that a deer has been here."

Nonnatural meaning: E.g., "The motel's sign being on means that it has no more vacancies."

○ Grice provides 5 criteria for determining whether a "meaning" expression is of the natural or nonnatural variety. I will present these criteria as diagnostic questions. Grice thinks that "No" answers to these 5 questions pick out natural meaning. "Yes" answers to these 5 questions pick out nonnatural meaning. (A natural question to ask is: But can't there be "meaning" expressions that have a combination of "Yes" and "No" answers?)

1. Is it possible that x means that p , but not- p ?
2. Does it follow from " x means that p " that x meant something?
3. Does it follow from " x means that p " that someone or something meant something by x ?
4. Can we restate " x means that p " as " x meant ' p '"?
5. Is it impermissible to restate " x means that p " as "The fact that x means that p "?

○ Grice also sees the intentional sense of 'mean' (e.g., "I meant to make the exam difficult.") as a species of natural meaning. Is this justified, though?

○ Grice thinks that nonnatural meaning can be explained in terms of natural meaning.

- Grice first considers, and rejects, a causal account of nonnatural meaning. Here's the proposal:

We might try to say, for instance, more or less with C.L. Stevenson, that for x to mean_{NN} something, x must have (roughly) a tendency to produce in an audience some attitude (cognitive or otherwise) and a tendency, in the case of a speaker, to *be* produced *by* that attitude ...

- Grice offers two specific objections against this proposal.

First:

It is not doubt the case that many people have a tendency to put on a tail coat when they think they are about to go to a dance, and it is also no doubt the case that many people, on seeing someone put on a tail coat, would conclude that the person in question was about to go to a dance. Does this satisfy us that putting on a tail coat means_{NN} that one is about to go to a dance (or indeed means_{NN} anything at all)? Obviously not.

Second: If telling someone “Jones is an athlete” tends to produce the belief that “Jones is tall”, then the latter would be part of what is meant in uttering the former. But this seems mistaken.

Maneuvers to avoid these objections, Grice claims, make the proposal circular.

- Grice also points out that this proposal, even if successful in accounting for *standard* meaning, does not account for what a speaker means on a particular occasion. Grice’s inversion of explanation:

One might even go further in criticism and maintain that the causal theory ignores the fact that the meaning (in general) of a sign needs to be explained in terms of what users of the sign do (or should) mean by it on particular occasions; and so the latter notion, which is unexplained by the causal theory, is in fact the fundamental one.

- Grice suggests that we begin with meanings from particular occasions in order to explain *timeless* meaning.

- First shot:

A first shot would be to suggest that “ x mean_{NN} something” would be true if x was intended by its utterer to induce a belief in some “audience” and that to say what the belief was would be to say what x meant_{NN}.

Grice objects that this will not do, however, because the utterer must also have intended for the audience to recognize this intention. The handkerchief story is supposed to show this.

◦ Second shot: Modify the first to meet the objection captured by the handkerchief story.

But Grice presents 3 counterexamples to this proposal. Here's one:

For example, Herod intended to make Salome believe that John the Baptist was dead and no doubt also intended Salome to recognize that he intended her to believe that St. John the Baptist was dead. Similarly for the other cases. Yet I certainly do not think that we should want to say that we have here cases of meaning_{NN}.

There is a significant difference between presenting someone with evidence that p , and telling them that p . Only with the latter is a recognition of the speaker's intention essential for its success. Recall the story of the photograph in which Mr. Y displays "undue familiarity to Mrs. X."

◦ Final shot:

Shortly, perhaps, we may say that " A meant_{NN} something by x " is roughly equivalent to " A uttered x with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention."

The new and important part of this proposal is the "by means of . . ." clause.

• 3 generalizations:

1. ". . . to ask what A meant is to ask for a specification of the intended effect."
 2. " x meant something" is (roughly) equivalent to "Somebody meant_{NN} something by x ."
 3. " x means_{NN} (timeless) that so-and-so" might as a first shot be equated with some statement or disjunction of statements about what "people" (vague) intend (with qualification about "recognition") to effect by x
- Grice claims that the intended effect must be controllable by the audience — it must be had for a reason and not merely caused. The grunting/blushing example is supposed to show this.
- Only the primary intention is relevant to meaning_{NN}.
- These intentions needn't be fully conscious, and there is not infallible first-person access to them. Context can also help determine intention.