

Classes #21-22 - Intention-Based Semantics
Grice, "Meaning"
Schiffer, "Toward an Account of *S*-Meaning"

I. Semantic Theory, Semantic Despair

Traditional accounts of meaning involve the public communication of private mental states.

Locke assumed that we have immediate access to those mental states.

The logical empiricists emphasized the public criteria for meaning, in verification, but did not cede or even denigrate the private component.

We have seen two kinds of accounts of meaning which undermine the importance or even the existence of private mental states.

Quine is skeptical about meanings and denies the meaningfulness of individual assertions taken apart from a larger language or theory.

Quine is willing to accept the meaningfulness of communication as long as it is explained in terms of public behavior.

Wittgenstein goes even further than Quine in denying the private component of communication.

In denying the possibility of a private language, Wittgenstein leads us to question the nature of mental states.

They are not a nothing, but, especially as far as rules of language (i.e. semantic theory) go, they are not a something either.

Let's back away from the doubts about mental states for a moment.

It may be the case that our mental states are not as robust as some philosophers (e.g. Descartes, Locke, Frege) take them to be.

Still, we do seem both to have beliefs and to be able to communicate those beliefs.

I believe that the Mets will be a better team next year.

I can communicate that belief to you.

You might even come to believe that the Mets will be a better team on the basis of my utterances.

Further, my utterances can effectively change the world.

If I wish that the door would be closed, I can just utter some words like, "Please close the door," to you and you are likely to close it.

Such power may seem like magic if our mental states are as thin as the skeptic portrays them to be.

One serious concern for semantic theory is the invocation of Fregean, third-realm objects.

For a theory of meaning, we want sentences of the form of MT for all expressions of a language.

MT (expression) x means that p

Sentences of the form MT (e.g. MT1 - MT3) will be the theorems of our meaning theory.

MT1 'Snow is white' means that snow is white.

MT2 'Grass is green' means that grass is green.

MT3 'The cat is on the mat' means that the cat is on the mat.

MT provides an analysis or explanation of the expression on the left in terms of a proposition of the sort that Frege defended on the right.

Propositions are abstract objects, mind-independent and language-independent.

Quine's arguments for meaning holism and Wittgenstein's arguments for meaning skepticism are directed at exactly this kind of ontologically tendentious meaning theory.

Quine's arguments about circularity (the closed curve in space) entail that we can not use any intensional idioms on the right side of MT.

If we fill in the right side of MT with extensional idioms, we run into problems with the limitations of extensionalism, its inability to distinguish, for example, 'creatures with a heart' from 'creatures with a kidney'.

Extensions provide the wrong conditions.

Options for semantic theory look bleak.

Grice has a proposal to get around the problems.

II. Speaker Meaning and Sentence Meaning

Grice's proposal for explaining communication is an attempt to retain a substantial semantic theory in light of skepticism about third-realm entities by completing the right side of the theorems of our semantic theory with terms that are not irreducibly intensional.

His proposal is called intention-based semantics, or IBS, because he explains semantics in terms of mental states, specifically intentions.

In other words, Grice wants to explain meaning in terms of thought.

A semantic theory is supposed to explain the meanings of sentences.

Grice, as Strawson before him, wants to explain the meanings of utterances, or uses, of sentences.

Grice's idea is that speaker-meaning will be easier to tackle than sentence-meaning.

We can appeal to the concrete uses of sentences, rather than their transcendent meanings.

Thus, Grice's theory will have theorems of the form GST.

GST By saying 'snow is white', the speaker meant...

Once we have an account of speaker-meaning, we can generate an account of the meanings of sentences, theorems of the form of MT, by reference to the meanings of individuals who use those sentences.

For an expression x to mean something at a particular time we merely appeal to Grice's analysis of 'Somebody meant something by x .'

For an expression to mean something timelessly, one would need a disjunctive statement about what people tend to effect by that expression.

Since Grice aims to explain sentence meaning in terms of speaker meaning, the goal of his IBS program is to analyze people's intentions when they communicate.

III. Natural and Non-Natural Meaning

Grice begins his article by distinguishing natural sense from non-natural meaning ($\text{meaning}_{\text{NN}}$).

It's worth a moment to notice $\text{meaning}_{\text{NN}}$ and then put it aside.

Natural meaning is exemplified by MN1 and MN2

MN1 Those spots mean measles.
MN2 The recent budget means that we shall have a hard year.

Grice presents five characteristics of such natural meaning.

- NM1. 'x means that p' entails that p;
- NM2. You can not conclude that p is what was meant by x;
- NM3. You can not conclude that there is any one who means anything by p (measles, budget);
- NM4. What is meant is not a proposition;
- NM5. One can recast the sentences as 'the fact that...'

Non-natural meaning is speaker-meaning and has come to be called that.
Cases of non-natural meaning have opposite characteristics.

- ~NM1. One can not conclude that p;
- ~NM2. You can conclude that something was meant by x;
- ~NM3. Somebody meant it;
- ~NM4. There is a proposition;
- ~NM5. You can not recast the statement as 'the fact that p means that q'.

Grice hoped to connect the analyses of natural and non-natural meaning.
(I take it that this hope is a consequence of his interest in natural-language philosophy.)
But, the lasting importance of Grice's work in this area was due to his IBS account of meaning_{NN}.

There are really two, inter-related points of Grice's focus on non-natural meaning.
First, like Russell and Quine, he wants to avoid references to spooky entities.
Note that natural meaning looks pretty easy to explain.
It involves no reference to spooky entities.
Second, in order to avoid reifying meanings, he wants to reduce meaning_{NN} to some other kind of natural property.

A consequence of the distinction between natural and non-natural meaning is that the theorems of Grice's semantic theory actually look like GST' rather than GST.

GST' By uttering 'snow is white', p *meant*_{NN...}

But, it's not important for us to distinguish natural and non-natural meaning, since it is clear that our job is Grice's non-natural meaning.
I will drop the subscripts and focus on statements of the form GST, rather than GST'.
Just remember that the idea is to reduce non-natural (or linguistic) meaning to natural meaning.

IV. Speaker Meaning

Grice's plan is to fill in the right sides of sentences like GST with references to speaker's intentions.
His first attempt at the abstract form of a meaning theory is G1.

G1 By saying x, S means that p iff S uttered x intending to form the belief that p in her audience.

According to G1, by saying, "It's a lovely day, today," to Mrs. Jones, I am intending to induce a belief in

Mrs. Jones that it is a lovely day.

The meaning of my expression is explained in terms of my intentions to form beliefs in Mrs. Jones.

Meaning is thus essentially a part of communication and use.

Grice himself demonstrates the problem with his first attempt.

Notice Gricean meaning theorems, like all definitions, are meant to include necessary and sufficient conditions on meaning.

The problem with G1 is that the condition is not sufficient for meaning; we can form a belief in an audience without uttering any claim.

Consider my act of leaving B's handkerchief near a murder scene to induce the belief in a detective that B is the murderer.

I induce in the detective a belief about B.

But it is not the case that the handkerchief means that B is the murderer.

The handkerchief is a clue, not an utterance communicated to the detective.

So, I can have the intention to form a particular belief in my audience without uttering anything.

Contrast this case of the handkerchief, for example, with the case in which I leave a signed, handwritten note that says, "B is the murderer."

In that case, I have meant something with the note.

The lesson of the handkerchief example is that not everything that induces a belief, or is intended to induce a belief, can be described as having meaning in the relevant sense.

One could easily fix G1 to avoid the handkerchief problem by changing its 'iff' to an 'only if' as in G1'.

G1' By saying x, S means that p only if S uttered x intending to form the belief that p in her audience.

Grice does not pursue G1' since he wants both necessary and sufficient conditions on meaning.

Instead, Grice argues that the problem with G1 is that it does not account for the fact that the speaker must intend the audience to recognize the speaker's intention behind the utterance.

In the handkerchief case, the detective does not recognize that anyone meant anything by the handkerchief.

Thus, G1 is too liberal, ascribing meaning where there is none.

Grice's second attempt to fill-in the blank on the right side of GST involves audience recognition.

G2 By saying x, S means that p iff
 a. S intends to form the belief that p in her audience; and
 b. S intends her audience to recognize that intention.

G2 avoids the handkerchief problem.

The audience, the detective, does not recognize the intention of the handkerchief.

Handkerchiefs don't have intentions.

But G2 is still insufficient as an account of meaning.

Grice provides three counterexamples to it.

First, in the Herod, Salome, and John the Baptist case, Herod intends to make Salome aware that John the Baptist is dead, but he has not said that he is dead.

Second, the child does not say that she is sick by showing that she is pale.

Third, my leaving broken china for my wife is not saying that my daughter broke the china.

In all three cases, a and b of G2 are fulfilled.

But there is no case of meaning to be explained.

Herod intended to make Salome believe that St. 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}. What we want to find is the difference between, for example, “deliberately and openly letting someone know” and “telling” and between “getting someone to think” and “telling” (Grice 382).

Grice uses an example of a photograph and a drawing to progress to his third attempt.

Both the photo and the drawing depict Mr. Y and Mrs. X getting friendly.

Grice shows them to Mr. X.

In both cases Grice intends Mr. X to form a belief.

In the case of the photograph, Grice does not mean anything.

But when Grice draws the picture, there seems to be meaning.

The difference seems to be that the intentions of the speaker must be tied to both the production of the utterance and to the recognition of that intention by the audience.

Grice’s final formulation, the official version of the theory for the purposes of this article, is G3.

- G3 By saying x, S means that p iff
- a. S intends his audience to form the belief that p; and
 - b. S intends that his audience recognize his intention; and
 - c. S intends that his audience form the belief that p at least partly because they recognize his intention to mean something by x.

The three cases adduced as objections to G2 fail to be counterexamples to G3 since clause c is not fulfilled in any of the cases.

Herod isn’t saying that John the Baptist is dead and Salome is not taking Herod to have intended to mean that John the Baptist is dead even if she is taking him to have communicated that fact.

The sick child is explicitly not saying that she is sick.

The father does not state that his daughter broke the china.

All three cases are of communication without meaning.

The missing factor, Grice believes, is captured by clause c, that the audience must recognize S’s meaning intention.

V. Imperatives and Commands.

Grice’s account is easily extended to imperatives and some actions.

Our commands and directions to others are communicated in the same sorts of ways that our beliefs are communicated.

In such cases, we are transferring our intentions by the recognition by the audience of those intentions.

I have a very avaricious man in my room, and I want him to go; so I throw a pound note out of the window. Is there here any utterance with a meaning_{NN}? No, because in behaving as I did, I

did not intend his recognition of my purpose to be in any way effective in getting him to go. This is parallel to the photograph case. If on the other hand I had pointed to the door or given him a little push, then my behavior might well be held to constitute a meaningful_{NN} utterance, just because the recognition of my intention would be intended by me to be effective in speeding his departure (Grice 384).

Other accounts of the communication of propositions, e.g. the verification theory, may also extend to imperatives.

Grice makes the extension explicit.

VI. A Two-Step Reduction

IBS attempts to reduce semantic phenomena to psychological phenomena with the further, physicalist goal of reducing the psychological to the physical.

The program is a thus two step reduction.

IBS has as its ultimate goal the reduction of all semantic facts to physical facts, the explanation of intensions in terms of intentions.

Grice's semantic theory is thus a reduction of linguistic representations to mental representations.

On the right side of G3 are references to intentions and beliefs.

Are these entities any less spooky than Fregean propositions?

Remember, Quine called referential beliefs into question.

At the beginning of "Two Dogmas," Quine criticizes Fregean meanings, whether they are taken to be mental states or third-realm entities.

Wittgenstein denigrated the view that private mental states are anything substantial.

Let's consider intentions, which are mental states.

Let's also put aside Wittgenstein's worries about mental states and assume that we have some.

We will require some explanation of those mental states, some theory of the mind.

Perhaps the mind is the brain, or the functional organization of the brain.

As long as our theory of mind accords with the laws of physics, it need not involve anything spooky.

Insisting on explanations of mental states in terms that are consistent with the laws of physics can help with worries about them.

If IBS works, it transfers the problems of explaining linguistic phenomena onto the philosophers of mind.

But that's some sort of progress.

VII. IBS and Physicalism

Stephen Schiffer was a proponent of IBS when and after he worked with Grice at Oxford in the 1960s.

His first book, *Meaning*, was the most sophisticated defense of the IBS programme.

In a précis of his second book, *Remnants of Meaning*, he characterizes nine core tenets of the IBS theorist.

- IBS1. There are semantic facts, including facts about meaning.
- IBS2. Natural language has a compositional meaning theory.
- IBS3. Meanings determine truth conditions.
- IBS4. It would not be possible for us to understand indefinitely many novel sentences without a compositional meaning theory.
- IBS5. There are belief facts.
- IBS6. Token physicalism: mental facts are (in some sense) physical facts.
- IBS7. Believing is a relation between a person and a thing that the person believes.
- IBS8. Physicalism: semantic facts are not irreducibly semantic and psychological facts are not irreducibly psychological.
- IBS9. IBS: the semantic reduces to the psychological (and eventually to the physical).

In *Remnants of Meaning*, Schiffer argues against each of these theses.

You could write a term paper on pretty much every chapter of the book, claims against each of the IBS tenets.

Let's look briefly at the physicalism underlying IBS6 and IBS8.

The IBS theorist is driven by a desire to reduce semantic facts to physical facts by way of mental facts.

Physicalism is the claim that everything there is is physical.

There are different ways to interpret what it means to be physical.

- P1. Being a commitment of a mature physics.
- P2. Having spatio-temporal location
- P3. Being an element of the causal nexus

Perhaps a better way of understanding physicalism is to see what kinds of things a physicalist might reject: Cartesian souls, abstract objects like sets or meanings, God.

Hobbes was a physicalist and there were others in the history of philosophy.

But until the twentieth century, a physical explanation of the mind was the central barrier to physicalism.

Claims that the mind could be explained in terms of the body seemed outlandish.

Behaviorism was the first physicalism theory of the mind.

Behaviorists (e.g. John Watson, B.F. Skinner) identified mental states with behavior.

Sophisticated behaviorists (e.g. Gilbert Ryle) added dispositions to behave.

For the behaviorist, pain is not an irreducibly mental state, but the disposition to scream, cry, wince, etc.

It is plausible that all of those behaviors, being observable properties of observable objects, can be explained in terms of physics, unlike our conscious mental states.

Unfortunately, there also seem to be mental states, like belief, that have no corresponding observable behaviors.

The behaviorist's appeal to dispositions mitigates the problem of describing mental states with no attached behavior.

I can be in pain but not scream or wince.

If I have a disposition to scream and wince, then the behaviorist can ascribe to me the pain, even with no attached behavior.

Similarly, my belief that there is a woodchuck living under my shed may be explained by my filling in holes around the shed, placing heavy objects where those holes had been, and ranting about woodchucks.

Unfortunately, the behaviorist's account of dispositions did not satisfactorily capture the causal role of

mental states.

It seems more accurate to say that my pain causes me to behave in various ways than to say that my pain is my disposition to behave in those ways.

Furthermore, behaviorists denigrated the role of neural structures in explaining and predicting behavior. It became clear that the brain has a central role in our explanations of minds.

In contrast to behaviorism, philosophers including J.J.C. Smart and U.T. Place developed what became known as identity theory.

Identity theory interprets mental states as causes of behavior.

The identity theorist's claim is that every token of a mental state is strictly identical with a token of a physical state.

Identity theory simply claims that sensations are brain processes.

The identity theorist urges us to see the identification of sensations with brain states like any other common theoretical identification in science, like the identity of water with H₂O.

Thus, identity theory is a version of token physicalism about the mind.

The identity theorist thinks of behavior as caused by thought, but not as constitutive of it.

Still, identity theory agrees with behaviorism that mental states are linked to behavior.

Identity theory defines, or picks out, mental states in terms of the behaviors they cause.

Unfortunately, there are significant problems with identity theory, as well.

Most seriously, it denies that anything without a human brain can have mental states.

Robots with advanced artificial intelligence (as in *Blade Runner*) might turn out to have minds.

There could be alien creatures with the intelligence of humans, but with a different architecture.

Identity theory is thus too chauvinist an analysis of the mind.

IBS is not committed to identity theory, but to the more general thesis that every mental state corresponds to a physical state.

Token physicalism is essentially a denial of Cartesian dualism.

IBS is, in this sense, a physicalist theory.

VIII. Schiffer's Repair of Grice's IBS Proposal

In Chapter 2 of *Meaning*, "Toward an Account of S-Meaning," Schiffer starts by considering a range of criticisms of Grice's account of speaker meaning.

By considering these objections, some from Strawson and Searle and some original ones, Schiffer develops a more-robust IBS account of speaker meaning.

Schiffer's account depends on his development of the concept of mutual knowledge*.

At the end of the chapter, Schiffer presents some serious worries about Grice's proposal.

In [Chapter 3](#), which we will not read, Schiffer rejects even the revised Gricean account and presents his own IBS theory of speaker meaning.

In this section of the notes, we will look at Schiffer's attempt to save Grice's account.

Then we will look at some general criticism of IBS.

We will not look directly at Schiffer's original account, but it would be a fine paper topic.

Let's start with Schiffer's version of Grice's account of speaker meaning.

Schiffer's account SG1 is essentially G3, above, with a little more explicit detail.

- SG1 *S* meant something by (or in) uttering *x* iff *S* uttered *x* intending
- (1) that *x* have a certain feature(s) *f*;¹
 - (2) that a certain audience *A* recognize (think) that *x* is *f*;
 - (3) that *A* infer at least in part from the fact that *x* is *f* that *S* uttered *x* intending (4):
 - (4) that *S*'s utterance of *x* produce a certain response *r* in *A*;
 - (5) that *A*'s recognition of *S*'s intention (4) shall function as at least part of *A*'s reason for his response *r* (Schiffer, [*Meaning*](#) 13).

In response to SG1, Schiffer considers Strawson's rats example.

Speaker *S* wants audience *A* to believe that a particular house is infested with rats.

S schemes to let loose a giant rat in the house.

A is watching, and believes that *S* does not know that *A* is watching.

But *S* does know that *A* is watching.

S also knows that *A* trusts *S*.

So when *S* brings the rat to the house, *S* knows that *A* will reason as follows:

S wouldn't do a crazy thing like letting a giant rat go loose in the house unless *S* really knows that the house is infested with rats and believes that this is the best way to show me that it is. So, the house must be infested with rats.

(There is a question here about why *S* doesn't just tell *A* about the rats, but put that aside.)

In this scenario, by letting the rat loose, *S* has fulfilled all the conditions 1-5 of SG1.

S intends that his release of the rat will lead *A* to believe that the house is rat-infested.

Further, *S* intends that *A* infer from the fact that *S* released the rat in the house that the house is infested.

We do want to say that *S* led *A* to infer that the house is infested with rats.

But, we don't want to say that *S* meant that the house is rat-infested by releasing the rat in the house.

Releasing a rat in a house is not an act of meaning in the proper sense (in contrast to the case of *S* just telling *A* that there are rats in the house).

So we need to add a condition to SG1 to eliminate the rat case from being a case of meaning in the relevant sense.

Strawson recommends adding a sixth condition, generating SG2.

¹ "If *S* is to mean something by uttering *x*, then *S* must intend *A* to recognize that *S* uttered *x* with the intention of producing thereby a certain response *r* in *A*. How will this recognition be achieved? It is implicit throughout Grice's article that *S* will utter *x* with the intention that *A* should recognize that *x* has a certain feature (or features) *J*, or that something *f* is true of *x*, and infer at least in part therefrom that *S* uttered *x* with the intention of producing *r* in *A*. In other words, if *S* meant something by uttering *x*, there is a certain feature (or features) such that *S* uttered *x* intending that a certain audience *A* should recognize that *x* is *f* and intending that *A* should think, on the basis (in part) of thinking that *x* is *f*, that *S* uttered *x* intending to produce a certain response *r* in *A*. For example: *S* utters 'It is raining' intending *A* to recognize that 'It is raining' has the feature of being an English sentence which means "it is raining" and intending *A* to infer (in part) therefrom that *S* uttered 'It is raining' intending thereby to produce in *A* the belief that it is raining, etc." (Schiffer, *Meaning*, p 11-12).

- SG2 *S* meant something by (or in) uttering *x* iff *S* uttered *x* intending
- (1) that *x* have a certain feature(s) *f*;
 - (2) that a certain audience *A* recognize (think) that *x* is *f*;
 - (3) that *A* infer at least in part from the fact that *x* is *f* that *S* uttered *x* intending (4):
 - (4) that *S*'s utterance of *x* produce a certain response *r* in *A*;
 - (5) that *A*'s recognition of *S*'s intention (4) shall function as at least part of *A*'s reason for his response *r*.
 - (6) that *A* should recognize *S*'s intention (3).

Now, the rat case seems to be ruled-out as a case of meaning.

S intends for *A* to recognize that the house is rat-infested (3), but he does not intend for *A* to recognize that *S* intends for *A* to recognize the full extent of *S*'s scheme (6).

So the example is not a case of speaker meaning according to SG2.

Unfortunately, the "Moon Over Miami" case is a case of meaning according to SG2.

In the "Moon Over Miami" case, the speaker sings the song in a repulsive voice with the intention of getting the audience to leave the room.

More specifically, the speaker (singer) wants *A* to leave the room because of *A*'s recognition that *S* wants *A* to leave the room.

But, *S* wants *A* to think that *A* is leaving the room because of the repulsive singing.

While *A* is intended to *think* that *S* intends to get rid of *A* by means of the *repulsive singing*, *A* is really intended to have as his reason for leaving the fact that *S* wants him to leave (18-9).

As in the rat case, we don't want *S*'s singing to be a case of meaning that *A* should leave the room. But *S*'s singing fulfills all of the conditions of SG2.

Thus, we need a further condition to rule it out, generating SG3 (which Schiffer rightly calls "not uncomplicated" (19)).

- SG3 *S* meant something by (or in) uttering *x* iff *S* uttered *x* intending
- (1) that *x* have a certain feature(s) *f*;
 - (2) that a certain audience *A* recognize (think) that *x* is *f*;
 - (3) that *A* infer at least in part from the fact that *x* is *f* that *S* uttered *x* intending (4):
 - (4) that *S*'s utterance of *x* produce a certain response *r* in *A*;
 - (5) that *A*'s recognition of *S*'s intention (4) shall function as at least part of *A*'s reason for his response *r*.
 - (6) that *A* should recognize *S*'s intention (3).
 - (7) that *A* recognize *S*'s intention (5).

Now the "Moon Over Miami" case is ruled out as a case of meaning, since *S* does not intend *A* to recognize his full intent.

Unfortunately, there are further counterexamples to even SG3.

As if conditions (1)-(7) were not torturous enough, here is a further counter-example, a variation on the last one, to show that we still do not have a set of jointly sufficient conditions (21-2).

In the “Tipperary” case, which is similar to the “Moon Over Miami” case, S wants his repulsive singing to force A to leave the room.

S recognizes, though, that A will infer that S really wants A to leave the room because of S’s intention to get A to leave the room.

But, S’s intentions in this case are simpler.

In the “Moon Over Miami” example there was an intended discrepancy between the reason *A* was intended to have for leaving and the reason *A* was intended to think he was intended to have. In the “Tipperary” example, *A* is intended to *think* (wrongly) that there is such an intended discrepancy” (22).

Again, a further condition assuring the alignment of intentions may be added to Schiffer’s growing Gricean account.

Since A, in the Tipperary account, does recognize all of S’s intentions (1)-(7), it looks like a case of meaning.

But again we don’t want to call it a case of meaning in the relevant sense.

We can add a further condition.

- SG4 *S* meant something by (or in) uttering *x* iff *S* uttered *x* intending
- (1) that *x* have a certain feature(s) *f*;
 - (2) that a certain audience *A* recognize (think) that *x* is *f*;
 - (3) that *A* infer at least in part from the fact that *x* is *f* that *S* uttered *x* intending (4):
 - (4) that *S*’s utterance of *x* produce a certain response *r* in *A*;
 - (5) that *A*’s recognition of *S*’s intention (4) shall function as at least part of *A*’s reason for his response *r*.
 - (6) that *A* should recognize *S*’s intention (3).
 - (7) that *A* recognize *S*’s intention (5).
 - (8) that *A* recognize *S*’s intention (7).

Again, the discrepancy between S’s intentions and the intentions that S intends A to recognize blocks S’s utterance from being a case of meaning.

The growing account of speaker meaning now successfully eliminates even the “Tipperary” case from being a case of meaning.

But, one may begin to suspect that even SG4 is insufficient.

In principle we could keep on constructing counter-examples of the above kind, each time requiring us to add a condition of the above nature (23).

These contrived counter-examples (Schiffer calls them *recherché*) have a feature in common.

In all of them, the speaker’s intentions are not quite what the speaker intends the audience to recognize. There is a kind of deception, perhaps merely a discrepancy, involved which prevents them from being cases of meaning.

But it is central to meaning, in the sense we are seeking, that the intentions be shared, that the speaker intend that the audience recognize the speaker’s intention.

In general, *S* can utter *x* intending to produce a certain response *r* in *A* by means of *A*’s recognition of this intention *only if* *S* expects *A* to recognize that *S* intends to produce *r* in *A* by

means of recognition of intention *or else* S intends to *deceive* A as to the means by which S intends to produce r in A . In other words, given that S intends to produce r in A by means of recognition of intention (in the relevant sense, of course) and given that S does not want to deceive A , then S must - on pain of not satisfying his primary intention to produce r in A - expect A to think that S intends A 's reason (or part of his reason) for his response r to be the fact that S intends to produce r in A (20).

Schiffer's analysis of Searle's Kennst... example appeals to the same kind of discrepancy.

In that case, an American soldier, captured by Italian troops in WWII, wants the Italians to believe that he is a German officer.

The American says the only sentence in German that he knows, 'Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen?'

The sentence means, in German, 'Knowest thou the land where the lemon trees bloom?.'

But the American wants the Italians to think that he means to express, 'I am a German officer.'

Searle believes that this example is a counterexample to the Gricean account because the meaning of the words is wholly detached from what the American officer is trying to communicate.

Schiffer responds that Searle's analysis is insufficient.

He agrees that the American does not mean, by his words, 'I am a German officer.'

But he contrasts the Kennst... case with a similar one.

At a boring party Miss S might say to her escort, Mr. A , 'Don't you have to inspect the lemon trees early in the morning?', and mean thereby that she wants to leave (28).

Schiffer is relying on intuitions that in the Kennst... case, the American does not mean what he wants to communicate while in the party example, Miss S does mean what she wants to communicate.

In the case where the modern-day Mrs. Malaprop confuses 'erratic' and 'erotic', her husband can use 'erotic' to mean 'erratic'.

So, it is not the case that we must intend words to have their standard meanings in order to use them to communicate.

I can use words that mean one thing to communicate another.

If that is so, and Schiffer looks to me to be correct in asserting that it is, then it is not clear why the American soldier can't mean to express 'I am a German soldier' with the 'Kennst...' sentence.

In any case, Schiffer believes that the proper analysis of Searle's Kennst... case is, like the cases which impelled us to SG4, one in which the difference between the speaker's intentions and what the speaker intends the audience to recognize block meaning.

Schiffer's final attempt to repair the Gricean account, then, is not to add a further condition like (6), (7), or (8).

Instead, Schiffer looks toward what the mathematicians might call a fixed-point theorem.

He develops a concept which he calls mutual knowledge* to replace (and comprehend) the growing preponderance of conditions.

IX. Mutual Knowledge

Schiffer's definition of mutual knowledge* (K^*) is recursive and presented formally.

He takes ' $K_x p$ ' to represent ' x knows that p '.

' K^*_{SAP} ' stands for 'the speaker and the audience mutually know that p '.

The characterization of mutual knowledge*, then, is just the formal definition of ' K^*_{SAP} '.

K^*_{SAP} iff	K_{Sp}	(S knows that p)
and	K_{Ap}	(A knows that p)
and	$K_S K_{Ap}$	(S knows that A knows that p)
and	$K_A K_{Sp}$	(A knows that S knows that p)
and	$K_S K_A K_{Sp}$	(S knows that A knows that S knows that p)
and	$K_A K_S K_{Ap}$	(A knows that S knows that A knows that p)
and so on.		

Schiffer illustrates the account of mutual knowledge with an example of two people sitting, facing each other, with a candle between them.

They each know that there's a candle between them.

They each know that the other knows that there's a candle between them.

They each know that the other knows that they know that there's a candle between them.

And so on.

Cases of mutual knowledge, Schiffer argues, are various.

Even people who do not know each other can have mutual knowledge, as in the case of ordinary people knowing that London is a city in England.

Schiffer spends some time describing conditions for mutual knowledge.

We won't spend time considering these conditions.

But it is worth a moment to recognize that ascribing mutual knowledge* commits us to a contentious account of our beliefs.

All "normal" people know that snow is white, know that all normal people know that snow is white, know that all normal people know that all normal people know that snow is white, and so on *ad infinitum* (32).

I don't know if Schiffer's claim is true.

It is the case that people have infinite numbers of beliefs.

We all know how to add any two numbers and there are infinite numbers of numbers.

Still, there is something about the ascriptions of infinitely prepended, higher- and higher-order knowledge claims that's worth considering.

Schiffer believes that such ascriptions are not problematic.

It should be clear (i) that I can go on like this forever; (ii) that this regress is perfectly harmless; and (iii) the phenomenon which obtains in this case is a general one: it will obtain, broadly speaking, whenever *S* and *A* know that *p*, know that each other knows that *p*, and all of the relevant facts are "out in the open" (32).

Some theories of knowledge are consistent with Schiffer's claim.

Others are not.

We won't pursue the distinction, here, or what kinds of constraints on a theory of knowledge adopting Schiffer's claim that we have mutual knowledge* requires.

We should see, though, how introducing the claim that we have mutual knowledge* allows him to revise his analysis of the purported counterexamples to SG1-SG4.

In Strawson's rat case, S and A do not mutually know* S's intention in letting loose the rat. In the "Moon Over Miami" and "Tipperary" cases, the speaker and audience also fail to have mutual knowledge*. Even in Searle's Kennst... case, the lack of mutual knowledge* seems to explain the lack of meaning. Thus, if we introduce mutual knowledge* as a condition on meaning, we can eliminate the purported counterexamples all at once.

In the standard or paradigm case of Gricean communication it is mutually known* by *S* and *A* that *S*'s utterance *x* has a certain feature(s) *f* and mutually known* that the fact that *S*'s utterance *x* is *f* (together with certain other facts) is conclusive evidence that *S* uttered *x* intending to produce a response *r* in *A* by means of recognition of this intention and conclusive evidence that *S* uttered *x* intending it to be mutual knowledge* that *S*'s utterance *x* is conclusive evidence that *S* uttered *x* intending to produce *r* in *A* by means of recognition of this intention (37).

Parallel to mutual knowledge* is a related concept of mutual belief*, for cases of communication which do not rise to the level of knowledge.

Invoking the concepts of mutual knowledge* and mutual belief*, then, leads Schiffer to what he thinks is the best Gricean account of speaker meaning.

X. The Best Gricean Account

SG5 *S* meant something by (or in) uttering *x* iff *S* uttered *x* intending thereby to realize a certain state of affairs *E* which is (intended by *S* to be) such that the obtainment of *E* is sufficient for *S* and a certain audience *A* mutually knowing* (or believing*) that *E* obtains and that *E* is conclusive (very good or good) evidence that *S* uttered *x* intending

- (1) to produce a certain response *r* in *A*;
- (2) *A*'s recognition of *S*'s intention (1) to function as at least part of *A*'s reason for *A*'s response *r*;
- (3) to realize *E* (39).

SG5, by invoking mutual knowledge* and mutual belief*, blocks all of the earlier counterexamples based on deception to the Gricean account.

If ascriptions of mutual knowledge* and mutual belief* are plausible, then, Schiffer has repaired holes in Grice's account.

Still, Schiffer has some concerns about SG5 which are not based on the problems of deception, as the Strawson and Searle cases were.

First, Schiffer argues that philosophical writing seems to be a counterexample even to SG5.

Philosophers do communicate their ideas.

Their writings have meaning.

But the meanings of philosophical writings do not depend on the audience's recognition of the writer's beliefs.

We do come to believe that a philosopher has certain beliefs by reading what they write.

But our reasons for coming to believe what they write, if we do, have nothing to do with recognizing the philosopher's intention.

Although Grice's primary intention in writing his paper was to induce in us certain beliefs (albeit of a "conceptual nature") about meaning, he neither expected nor intended that our reason for believing that what he wrote is true would be the fact that he intended us to believe that what he wrote is true (43).

We believe what we do on the basis of our apprehension of its truth, not the authority of the writer. Grice has, as Schiffer pointed out, overlooked the difference between liars and sophists. The liar wants you to believe what s/he says. The sophist wants you to come to a false belief on your own.

Similarly, in cases of reminding and pointing out, we communicate content, we get an audience to activate a belief, but we do not do so on the basis of our audience's recognition of our intention. We get our audience to activate their beliefs based on the fact that they actually hold those beliefs.

Schiffer has provided us with a reinforced version, S5, of Grice's theory. Still, there are counterexamples. In *Meaning*, Schiffer does not give up IBS; he provides his own, non-Gricean IBS theory. In the later *Remnants of Meaning*, Schiffer gives up IBS altogether. We will look a little more at Schiffer's development of these counterexamples in later work.

XI. IBS and Propositional Attitudes

The proponent of IBS envisions all semantic facts to be reducible to psychological facts. Any claim about meaning should thus be expressible exclusively in mental terms. In particular, sentence-meaning is explained in terms of speaker-meaning, and speaker-meaning is explained in terms of the beliefs of the speaker and his/her audience. When we try to explain the mental states of belief and other propositional attitudes, though, we seem to need to appeal to semantic facts about the propositions that people believe.

IB Izzy believes that a monster named Boris is under the bench.

The sentence IB seems to be a relation between Izzy and the proposition MB.

MB that a monster named Boris is under the bench

But, MB is explained, in IBS, by Izzy's beliefs when using IB. Thus, the IBS account of meaning appears to be circular.

In [*Remnants of Meaning*](#), Schiffer argues against using propositions as the things to which believers relate.

A proposition will be structured.

One element of that structure might be either a subject or a mode of presentation of a subject; another element might be either a property or a mode of presentation of a property.

The Fregean argues that MB is built out of the mode of presentation of Boris and the sense of the sentential function 'x is under the bench'.

The Russellian argues that MB is built out of Boris himself and the property of being under the bench. (We call this directly-referential proposition Russellian, though you might prefer to think of it as Millian

or Kripkean).

Schiffer claims that neither of those options work.

I'll omit Schiffer's arguments against propositions, here, though they are a fine couple of paper topics. The point of Schiffer's arguments against propositions is to undermine the claim that belief is a relation between a believer and a proposition.

There are plenty of other reasons, consistent with Schiffer's central commitments, to that same end. For one, externalism opposes the view that my belief is a grasping of some sense which determines the reference of its component objects.

Even if cats turn out to be robots, and I think that cats are animals, I still have beliefs about those things. My beliefs about arthritis, or water (as in Twin Earth examples), do not depend on my having full knowledge of the referents of the objects of those beliefs.

But, if my belief were just a relation to a proposition, then it would seem that I should be able to grasp all the components of that proposition.

Given the commitments of IBS to a compositional meaning theory, it would seem even more important that I be able to grasp, fully, the facts about the component parts of any proposition.

One alternative to taking belief as a relation between a believer and a proposition which Schiffer explores is to take the objects of belief to be sentences in our language of thought, which is sometimes called Mentalese.

We will not pursue the problems of taking propositions as sentences of mentalese.

For more on these questions, see Schiffer's article "Propositional Content" in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Language*, which is on reserve in the library.

Lastly, one could take beliefs and the other propositional attitudes as basic and unexplained.

Certainly, I felt that the project of defining the semantic in terms of the psychological was fairly pointless if one was then going to view propositional attitudes as primitive and inexplicable...

What could be the point of trading in facts about *meaning* for facts about the *content of beliefs* if one ends up with nothing to say about the latter? (Schiffer, *Remnants 2*)

XII. The End of IBS

For many reasons, but especially ones described in the previous section, Schiffer became disillusioned with IBS.

Remnants of Meaning is a rejection of the basic premises of the IBS programme.

In the end, Schiffer presents what he calls the no-theory theory of meaning.

Schiffer's later view can be classified under the broad heading of minimalism, or what I will call deflationism.

The deflationist, inspired by the later Wittgenstein, thinks that there is no unique essence to meaning.

It might be that there are lots of different kinds of meaning.

It might be that meaning is a kind of illusion, a term of folk semantics that will be eliminated by mature theories of language and thought.

[Mark Johnston](#) presents four elements of his minimalism.

- J1. *Meaning has no hidden and substantial nature for a theory to uncover.* All we know and all we need to know about meaning in general is given by a family of platitudes of the sort articulated earlier.
- J2. Those platitudes taken together exhibit talk about the meaning of an expression as reifying talk about the potential of the expression to be used to assert, command, ask about, etc. various things.
- J3. So *understanding the meanings of expressions is not something that lies behind and is the causal explanatory basis of the ability to use the expressions* to assert, command, ask about, etc. various things. Rather it is constituted by this ability.
- J4. So a theory of meaning could be at most a statement of propositions knowledge of which would enable us to come to acquire the practical ability. But in this regard a translation manual could serve almost as well. Hence the interest of a theory of meaning is minimal and certainly *no interesting issue about objectivity, realism or the relation between the mind and reality can be raised by considering questions about the form of a theory of meaning* (Johnston, 38; emphasis added).

J1 is an anti-essentialist, anti-Fregean claim that a meaning theory really just yields facts about meaning, and not deeper facts about thought itself, or metaphysics.

Theories of meaning will not guide our uses of language.

There are many different ways to have meaning, and thus many different theories.

They all just come along for the ride, as we communicate.

We can see in J2 and J3 a line from Wittgenstein through Strawson to the deflationist.

Recall that Strawson criticized Russell for making sentences prior to assertions.

J2 urges that Frege made an error of reifying meanings, an error against which Quine warned when he defended meaningfulness without meaning.

Johnston's claim is that the use of expressions precedes their meanings.

J3 further alleges that the use of expressions constitutes their meaning.

Meaning, rather than guiding use, is a consequence of use.

Lastly, J4 claims that the theory of meaning is independent of any metaphysical theory.

All that a theory of meaning will do is yield some ordinary platitudes about the uses of expressions and sentences.

It can not go beyond those uses, since use is all there is to meaning.

Even if Johnston's characterization of deflationism is clear, it is not an argument.

It seems to me that his argument is sort of Ockhamist.

The Fregean reifies meanings, and uses them to explain communication.

Johnston argues that we can have a meaning theory which satisfies the platitudes, and which neither reifies meanings nor asks them to play a causal role.

He is not opposed to abstract objects, *per se*.

But, a theory with less potent posited entities is preferable.

The deflationary perspective is thus a sharp contrast to the Fregean view of meaning.

For Frege, and other philosophers who sought substantive theories of meaning, the goal was not merely a theory of the particular language we use, nor even a universal theory of language, but answers to the most important philosophical questions.

If it turns out that there is no essence to meaning, as the deflationist claims, there would consequently be

no essence to thought or objectivity.

If Fregean hopes for semantics were unrealizable, then no progress would have been made on nineteenth century idealism.

We could be back in the arms of the absolute!

The deflationist, of course, thinks that there are alternatives to idealism in the absence of a full-blown theory of meaning.

In particular, we might console ourselves with extensionalist theories of truth and reference.