Philosophy 308
The Language Revolution
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Class #23
IBS

Speaker Meaning:
Grice's Final Formulation

- 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.

- Earlier formulations failed to be necessary and sufficient conditions.

- The three objections to the earlier formulations fail to be counterexamples
    - ‣ 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.
    - ‣ The sick child is explicitly not saying that she is sick.
    - ‣ The father does not state that his daughter broke the china.
    - ‣ Clause c is not fulfilled in any of these cases of communication without meaning.

- Schiffer, Strawson, and Searle find further counterexamples.

A Two-Step Reduction

The Big Picture

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.

- Step 1: Reduce semantic phenomena to psychological phenomena
- Step 2: Reduce the psychological to the physical
- Ultimate goal the reduction of all semantic facts to physical facts.
  - Intensions in terms of intentions
  - Linguistic representations as mental representations
- Turn philosophy of language into philosophy of mind.

Core Tenets of IBS
Via Schiffer

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).

Gricekenstein?

- Grice's program may seem incompatible with the Wittgensteinian arguments against privacy.
  - ‣ Is he rejecting the traditional PLA and its skepticism about mental states?
- But there are influences of LW's later work.
  - ‣ "Wittgenstein thought speaker's intentions determine the contents of linguistic utterances. His remarks on use are only intended to emphasize the heterogeneity of natural language... Wittgenstein anticipated the basic tenets of Gricean intention-based semantics. These are, in particular, the distinction between 'natural' and 'non-natural' meaning and the distinction between what a speaker means by an utterance and what the expression uttered means in the speaker's natural language. Importantly, Wittgenstein also believed that only the meaning of the speaker determined the content of ambiguous expressions, such as 'bank', on a particular occasion of utterance" (Unnsteinsson 2015).
  - ‣ The appeals to conventions
  - ‣ The communal aspects of meaning
  - ‣ Seeing meaning in its natural habitat?

Three Versions of Physicalism

P1. Our commitments are those of a mature physics.

P2. All objects have spatio-temporal location.

P3. What exists is just the causal nexus and its components.

Schiffer's Version of Grice's IBS Proposal

- SG1: *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) 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).

Against SG1/G3

SG1: *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) 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).

- Strawson's rats example
  - S wants 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.
- S has fulfilled the conditions of SG1.
- But releasing a rat in a house is not an act of meaning in the proper sense.
  - Contrast with S just telling A that there are rats in the house.

Schiffer's Second Attempt

Via Strawson

- 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) 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).

- The rat case is ruled-out.
  – 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).
  – The example is not a case of speaker meaning according to SG2.

Problems with SG2

"Moon Over Miami"

- S sings the song in a repulsive voice with the intention of getting the audience to leave the room.
    - ‣ S 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).
- 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.

Schiffer's Third Attempt

"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) 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).

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

- "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).

And So On

- Schiffer proposes a fourth variation (Tipperary example), but we'll skip it.

- "*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).

- In the counter-examples we saw, the speaker's intentions are not quite what the speaker intends the audience to recognize.
  - ▸ deception or discrepancy

- 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 Fixed Point

mutual knowledge*

- $K^*_{SA}p$: the speaker and the audience mutually know that p'

- $K^*_{SA}p$ iff K_Sp (S knows that p)
  - and KAp (A knows that p)
  - and K_SK_Ap (S knows that A knows that p)
  - and K_AK_Sp (A knows that S knows that p)
  - and $K_SK_AK_Sp$ (S knows that A knows that S knows that p)
  - and $K_AK_SK_Ap$ (A knows that S knows that A knows that p)
  - and so on.

- Even people who do not know each other can have mutual knowledge.
  - London is a city in England.

Mutual Knowledge and IBS

- 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" case, the speaker and audience also fail to have mutual knowledge*.

- "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).

The Best Gricean Account

- SGB: *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).
- SGB blocks all of the earlier counterexamples based on deception to the Gricean account.

Problems with the Best Gricean Account

Infinite 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).

- People do 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).

Meaning May Be Independent of Audience

- Philosophical writing
  - ‣ Philosophers communicate their ideas in writings which have meaning.
  - ‣ But the meanings of philosophical writings do not depend on the audience's recognition of the writer's beliefs.
  - ‣ 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 write is true" (43).
  - ‣ We believe what we do on the basis of our apprehension of its truth, not the authority of the writer.

- Reminding and pointing out
  - ‣ We communicate content.
  - ‣ We get an audience to activate a belief.
  - ‣ 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.

Discrepancy

A Problem in Principle for IBS?

- The content of our communication may not match the content of our words

- Searle: 'Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen?'
  - ‣ Schiffer: the American does not mean, by his words, 'I am a German officer.'

- But:
  - ‣ "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).
  - ‣ Miss *S* does mean what she wants to communicate.

- If Mrs. Malaprop confuses 'erratic' and 'erotic', her husband can use 'erotic' to mean 'erratic'.

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

- Does the soldier express 'I am a German soldier' with the 'Kennst...' sentence?

IBS and Propositional Attitudes

- The proponent of IBS envisions all semantic facts to be reducible to psychological facts.
  - Sentence-meaning is explained in terms of speaker-meaning.
  - Speaker-meaning is explained in terms of the beliefs of the speaker and audience.
- When we try to explain the mental states of belief and other propositional attitudes, though, we seem to appeal to semantic facts about the propositions that people believe.
  - Izzy believes that a monster named Boris is under the bench.
  - that a monster named Boris is under the bench
- The meaning of (some) sentences both presupposes and is explained by an account of beliefs.
  - circularity
- Schiffer: propositions are not the things to which believers relate.
  - "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)

The End of IBS

- Minimalism/Deflationism/Wittgensteinianism
- 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).