

PHIL 332: Philosophy of Language
Class 15: Grice's 'Meaning'

1. Grice's aim: to give a reductive account of a particular kind of meaning, in terms of intentions.
2. He distinguishes two uses of the verb 'mean': the *natural* use and the *nonnatural* use. And with it two kinds of meaning: *natural* meaning (meaning_N) and *nonnatural* meaning (meaning_{NN}).

Natural:

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

Nonnatural:

- c. Those three rings of the bell mean that the bus is full.
 - d. That remark meant that Smith found his wife indispensable.
 - e. My drawing and showing the picture meant that Mr Y had been unduly familiar.
3. He points to five differences between the two uses:
 - a. If the recent budget means that we shall have a hard year then we shall have a hard year.
 - b. If those three rings of the bell mean that the bus is full, then something is meant by those three rings.
 - c. If those three rings of the bell mean that the bus is full, then someone means something by those three rings.
 - d. If those three rings of the bell mean that the bus is full, then those three rings mean 'the bus is full'.
 - e. If those spots mean measles then the fact that he has those spots means that he has measles.
 4. Maybe we can draw the distinction between the two uses more precisely?
 - a. Each sentence involving the first use can be paraphrased in the form 'The fact that P means that Q', where 'P' and 'Q' are to be replaced by declarative sentences. In these sentences the verb 'mean' expresses a 2-place relation between propositions.
 - b. Each sentence involving the second use can be paraphrased in the form 'S means that P by x', where 'S' is to be replaced by a noun phrase, 'P' by a declarative sentence, and 'x' by an expression that refers to what Grice calls an 'utterance'. In these sentences the verb 'mean' expresses a 3-place relation between a subject, a proposition, and an utterance.
 5. Grice raises the question: what is meaning_{NN}?

6. He rejects the following 'causal' answer:

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, these tendencies being dependent on "an elaborate process of conditioning attending the use of the sign in communication."

- a. Problem: Putting on a rain coat. The given conditions are not sufficient (they over generate).
- b. Problem: Telling that Jones is an athlete (over generates).
- c. Problem: Only works for standard meaning, not particular meaning.

7. Grice offers his own analysis, in four steps:

- a. A meant that p by x iff A intended x to induce the belief that p in some audience.

Problem: Leaving a hanky at the murder scene. The conditions are not sufficient (they over generate).

- b. A meant that p by x iff A intended x to induce the belief that p in some audience, and intended the audience to recognize that intention.

Problem: I leave the china my daughter has broken lying around for my wife to see. The conditions are not sufficient (they over generate).

- c. A meant that p by x iff A intended x to induce the belief that p in some audience, and intended the audience to recognize that intention, and that recognition makes a difference.

Problem: Frowning. The conditions are not necessary (they under generate).

- d. A meant that p by x iff A intended x to induce the belief that p in some audience, *by means of* the recognition of this intention.

8. Grice extends the analysis to effects other than inducing beliefs:

- a. A meant so-and-so by x iff A intended x to induce the so-and-so effect in some audience, *by means of* the recognition of this intention.

Need to qualify: Primary intention only.

9. Grice extends the analysis:

- a. x meant so-and-so iff somebody meant so-and-so by x .
Problem: Traffic light changing to red.
- b. x means (timeless) so-and-so iff ... or ... or ... (a statement or disjunction of statements about what people mean by x).