

HOW MANY THINGS MUST A SPEAKER INTEND  
(BEFORE HE IS SAID TO HAVE MEANT)?

Let us take the following as an informal abbreviation of the analysans which Grice (1957) gave in his original analysis of "S meant<sub>nn</sub> something by (uttering) x":

- 1  $I_S(r_A)$
- 2  $I_S(B_A(I_S(r_A)))$
- 3  $I_S(r_A // B_A(I_S(r_A)))$

" $I_S(---)$ " is short for "A certain speaker  $S$  utters  $x$  intending (thereby to bring about) that  $---$ "; " $r_A$ " says that a certain response  $r$  is produced in a certain audience  $A$ ; " $B_A(---)$ " is short for " $A$  believes that  $---$ ", and " $r_A // B_A(---)$ " is short for " $A$ 's belief that  $---$  is at least part of  $A$ 's reason for producing  $r$ ".

Counterexamples have been presented in which an  $S$  fulfils 1–3 in uttering some  $x$  but has an additional intention which makes the example a case of not meaning something by  $x$ . In the example given by Strawson it is not only true of  $S$  that 1–3 but also that 4b–4f:<sup>1</sup>

- 4a  $I_S(B_A(I_S(B_A(I_S(\neg r_A))))))$
- 4b  $I_S(B_A(I_S(B_A(\neg I_S(r_A))))))$
- 4c  $I_S(B_A(I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(r_A))))))$
- 4d  $I_S(B_A(\neg I_S(B_A(I_S(r_A))))))$
- 4e  $I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(B_A(I_S(r_A))))))$
- 4f  $\neg I_S(B_A(I_S(B_A(I_S(r_A))))))$

4a and 4b state that  $S$  has an intention that  $A$  should falsely believe (short:  $S$  has an *IFB*) that some false belief is intended. 4c is about an *IFB* that something true is intended not to be believed. 4d is about an *IFB* that something true is not intended to be believed. 4e states that  $S$  has an intention that something true should not be believed by  $A$ . Lastly, 4f says only that  $S$  does not have a certain intention. Any of the sentences 4a–4f entails all the sentences listed beneath it, and none of those sentences is entailed by any – or even all – listed beneath it.

4f does not entail that *S* has an intention to conceal something from *A*, neither does it entail that *S* has an intention to mislead *A* somehow. But such “bad” intentions are the crucial feature that makes counterexamples of the stories given by Strawson, Stampe, and Schiffer: There is no story about *S* in which he fulfils 1–3 and 4f, but not 4a–4e in uttering some *x*, and which in virtue of only these circumstances would constitute a counterexample against the sufficiency of the original Gricean analysans. Hence, I think, we are not forced to add the negation of 4f, namely

$$4 \quad I_S(B_A(I_S(B_A(I_S(r_A))))))$$

to the conditions 1–3 but, at most, the negation of 4e which excludes 4a–4e, i.e. all “bad” intentions that are pertinent to the counterexample in question. The addition of 4 to the original conditions is a superfluously strong means for eliminating this counterexample.

This is correspondingly true for those counterexamples, presented by Schiffer<sup>2</sup>, which were taken to show the need for the addition of a fifth and sixth condition:

$$5 \quad I_S(B_A(I_S(r_A//B_A(I_S(r_A))))))$$

$$6 \quad I_S(B_A(I_S(B_A(I_S(r_A//B_A(I_S(r_A))))))))).$$

#### HOW NOT TO DEAL WITH SUCH COUNTEREXAMPLES

If, in spite of such counterexamples, one sticks to the basic idea that the analysandum should be analyzed in terms of speaker’s intentions, at least the following positions remain open to him.<sup>3</sup>

- (a) Closing the list of intentions and declaring it to be humanly impossible to have a still more intricate intention which would be disastrous for an analysis that requires the speaker to fulfil conditions 1–5 or, even, 1–6.
- (b) Closing the list of intentions and waiting for intelligible counterexamples which show the need for the addition of a further condition; then closing, waiting, and, if the necessity arises, adding again, and, possibly, again ....
- (c) Arguing that it depends on various factors how many (and which) intentions are required for some speaker to mean something by uttering something.
- (d) Requiring of the speaker to have infinitely many intentions with an infinitely increasing degree of intricacy.<sup>4</sup>

None of these positions are satisfactory. Position (a) does not make further counterexamples impossible but only declares them to be impossible; (b) is simply the resort to a permanent *ad hoc*-maneuver — which is especially inappropriate in a case where one knows exactly against what type of statements the analysis is to be armed. Position (c) yields a non-uniform analysis of the concept in question. Position (d), if written out appropriately, in fact eliminates all possibly impending counterexamples of the relevant sort.<sup>5</sup> Yet it is not satisfactory, because the means used to achieve the desired end are counterintuitively strong. In effect, this position yields a concept-analysis including (i) infinitely many unintelligible and (ii) infinitely many conceptually superfluous conditions all of which (iii) are usually not satisfied in cases that make up the typical instances of someone's meaning something, i.e. cases where a rational speaker tries to communicate with a certain audience *A* by means of a certain utterance *x*, and neither assumes *A* not to be rational (at least as far as *A*'s producing the desired response *r* is concerned), nor *x* to have a natural meaning (for *A*) such that *A*'s recognition of *x* would by itself give *A* a reason to produce *r*.<sup>6</sup>

#### A BETTER WAY

The basic idea stems from Grice. He considers the possibility of eliminating potential counterexamples "by requiring [*S*] *not* to have a certain sort of intention or complex of intentions. Potential counterexamples of the kind with which we are at present concerned all involve the construction of a situation in which [*S*] intends *A*, in the reflection process by which *A* is supposed to reach his response, *both* to rely on some 'inference-element' (some premiss or some inferential step) *E* and also to think that [*S*] intends *A* *not* to rely on *E*. Why not, then, eliminate such potential counterexamples by a single clause which prohibits [*S*] from having this kind of complex intention?"<sup>7</sup>

This proposal is vague but clear enough to be recognisably mistaken. It is vague insofar as it leaves us in the dark about the form and content the so-called "inference-element" can take. Hence the proposal is vague as to what is excluded by it. But surely, it is too weak a condition. Let *E* be  $I_S(r_A)$ , which of course has to be some value of "*E*": it is a premiss "in the reflection process by which *A* is supposed to reach his response" (as condition 3 shows) and *S* intends *A* to rely on it in that process (as condition 2 shows). Now, the Gricean proposal excludes that both 2 and 4c hold.

- 2  $I_S(B_A(I_S(r_A)))$   
 4c  $I_S(B_A(I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(r_A))))))$

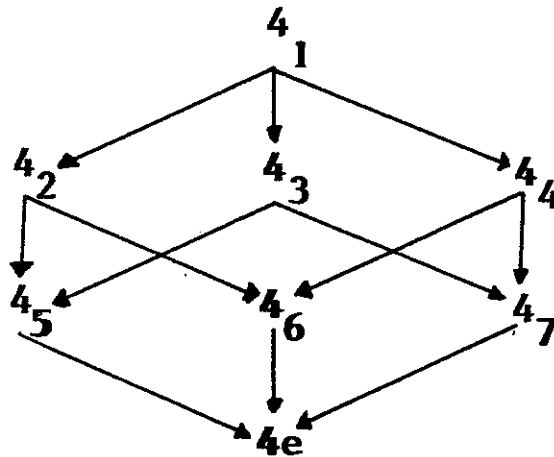
Since 2 holds as a condition of the analysans, 4c – and, *a fortiori*, 4a and 4b – are excluded, as they ought to be. But the remaining two “bad” intentions – namely 4d and 4e – are not excluded by the Gricean proposal, which allows for counterexamples like the following. *S* wants her husband *A*, working into the night, to interrupt his work and come to her in the bedroom. She does not want to call him, for whatever reasons. So she decides to fake some moaning and groaning as if being tortured by a bad nightmare. She intends her husband to reason as follows: “This is no genuine moaning and groaning, and it cannot be, because I just heard her blow her nose (and she is surely no sleep-noseblower). Obviously, she wants me to look in on her. But it is equally obvious that *she does not want me to know that she wants me to look in on her* (otherwise she would have called me). On the other hand, *she does not care if I find out that she intends me to come to her* (otherwise she either would not have blown her nose, or she would have blown it a little more cautiously, or she would have waited for a while after blowing it). Anyway, what counts is that she wants me to look in on her, and that’s why I’ll go to her”. It seems to be clear that *S*, by her subsequent moaning and groaning, does not mean anything in Grice’s favored sense although she fulfils 1–3 and has none of the “bad” intentions represented by 4a–4c.<sup>8</sup> What makes this case one of not meaning something by an utterance is that *S* intends *A* to rely on the first italicized proposition which – as she knows very well – is false. Having this intention is to fulfil 4d and, *a fortiori*, 4e and 4f, and therefore at least 4d ought to be excluded.

As for 4f, I have argued above that its exclusion is an unnecessarily and counterintuitively strong requirement. Now, what about admitting or excluding 4e? I do not know of a counterexample where a speaker fulfils 1–3 and 4e but not 4d. But I prefer to exclude 4e, partly because of the intuitive reason that having an intention to conceal something relevant does not seem to fit in the Gricean conception of what it means to mean something by an utterance. Another part of my reason why I tend to exclude 4e is that its negation excludes all potentially “bad” intentions which are not excluded by the negation of 4d. Such intentions are represented by the following sentences:

- 41  $I_S(\neg B_A(\neg I_S(B_A(I_S(\neg r_A))))))$   
 42  $I_S(\neg B_A(\neg I_S(\neg B_A(\neg I_S(\neg r_A))))))$

- 43  $I_S(\neg B_A(\neg I_S(B_A(\neg I_S(r_A))))))$
- 44  $I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(\neg r_A))))))$
- 45  $I_S(\neg B_A(\neg I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(r_A))))))$
- 46  $I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(B_A(\neg I_S(\neg r_A))))))$
- 47  $I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(\neg B_A(\neg I_S(r_A))))))$

The relations of entailment between these sentences and 4e are as follows (the arrow stands for “entails”):<sup>9</sup>



So, the negation of 4e excludes not only the dubious intention to conceal that condition 2 is satisfied, but also other dubious intentions to conceal something relevantly true. Since I do not know of any reason to allow those intentions and since I am anxious that they prepare the ground for yet to be invented counterexamples, I propose to rule them out by way of requiring the negation of 4e.

Now, let us say that *S*, in uttering *x*, is in no way *secreacious* (i.e. secretive or mendacious) towards *A* with respect to *p* iff it is not the case that *S* wants (and, *a fortiori*, it is not the case that he intends) *A* not to believe any proposition expressed by a *purely affirmative Gricean p-sentence*. Such sentences are defined as follows:

1. “*p*” is a purely affirmative Gricean *p*-sentence; and
2. if “*q*” is a purely affirmative Gricean *p*-sentence, then “ $I_S(B_A(q))$ ” is one as well.

So, if *S*, in uttering *x*, is in no way *secreacious* towards *A* with respect to *p*, then it *a fortiori* is true that

$$\begin{aligned}
 & p \\
 & \neg I_S(\neg B_A(p)) \\
 & \neg I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(B_A(p)))) \\
 & \neg I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(B_A(I_S(B_A(p)))))) \\
 & \neg I_S(\neg B_A(I_S(B_A(I_S(B_A(I_S(B_A(p))))))))
 \end{aligned}$$

Obviously, this infinite series consists of sentences with a form (and an appropriately innocent content), appropriate to remove all counterexamples (given or yet to be invented) of the well-known and tiresome kind. If we replace “*p*” by the first condition of the original Gricean analysans, the third sentence of this series excludes counterexamples as presented by Strawson, Stampe and myself (above). If we replace “*p*” by the third condition of the original analysans, then the second sentence of this series removes the first — and the third, the second — Schifferian counterexample.

So it seems fairly natural to say: <sup>10</sup> *S* meant something by (uttering) *x* if *S* satisfied conditions 1–3 of the original Gricean analysis and, additionally,

- 4\* in uttering *x*, *S* was in no way secracious towards *A* with respect to his satisfying 1 and 3.

#### HOW TO DEAL WITH THE COUNTEREXAMPLES

But still 4\* is not exactly what we are looking for. It is too strong. Consider

$$7 \quad \neg I_S(B_A(I_S(B_A(I_S(r_A))))),$$

a statement that is in full accord with 4\* and which may be true in a case of Gricean meaning. By accepting 4\* we would rule out that *S* intends 7, even if true, to be believed by *A*, in fact, we would not even allow *S* to intend 7 not to be disbelieved by *A*. Rare as such intentions may be, they are respectable in any respect. Hence statements like 8 and 9 should not be excluded unconditionally.

$$8 \quad I_S(\neg B_A(\neg 7))$$

$$9 \quad I_S(B_A(7))$$

They should be excluded if 7 is false, and admitted otherwise. This can easily be done by modifying the definition of secraciousness in such a way that *S* is only required not to want *A* not to believe any proposition expressed by a true purely affirmative Gricean *p*-sentence. Although this would help with 8 and 9, a new counterexample arises immediately. Suppose that 7–9 are true; then the envisaged modification of 4\* does not exclude

- 10  $I_S(\neg B_A(8))$   
 11  $I_S(\neg B_A(9))$   
 12  $I_S(B_A(\neg 8))$   
 13  $I_S(B_A(\neg 9))$ ,

simply because 8 and 9 are not purely affirmative Gricean 1-sentences. But if 7–9 are true then by 10–13 obviously “bad” intentions are ascribed to *S*; so we should exclude those statements.

Therefore let us say that *S*, in uttering *x*, is in no way *mendative* (i.e. mendacious or secretive) towards *A* with respect to *p* iff it is not the case that *S* wants *A* not to believe any proposition expressed by a true Gricean *p*-sentence. (A *Gricean p-sentence* is any sentence which results from applying arbitrarily many negation signs – possibly none – to a purely affirmative Gricean *p*-sentence or to any of its sub-sentences.)

Accordingly, I propose to add the following condition to the original analysans: <sup>11</sup>

- 4\*\* In uttering *x*, *S* was in no way mendative towards *A* with respect to his satisfying 1–3.

An advantage of this proposal is, I think, that it removes the known and yet to be invented counterexamples against the sufficiency of the original Gricean analysans without being committed to the disadvantages of the other proposals mentioned above; namely: mere claim of exclusion, *ad hoc*-ness, non-uniformity in conceptual analysis, and use of superfluously strong means (which leads to falsities, unintelligibilities and, last and not least, to sheer humbug). <sup>12</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Strawson (1964). Different versions of this example were invented by Stampe and Schiffer (1972, 17–18). For Stampe’s version see Grice (1969, 154).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Schiffer (1972, 18–23). – Grice (1969, 155–159) accepted the first, but not the second of Schiffer’s examples as a genuine counterexample. His refusal to accept the second is partly based on resorting to positions (a) and (c), as specified below. Schiffer’s refusal to accept Grice’s refusal is based on three arguments of which I think only the second to be sound; cf. Schiffer (1972, 24–26).

<sup>3</sup> Of course, other positions are possible; e.g. one that takes resort to self-referential intentions. Harman (1974, 225) and Putnam (1975, 284) seem to flirt with such a position. But I would not like to go even this far.

<sup>4</sup> Or, as Schiffer (in conversation) prefers to put it, *one* intention – consisting of infinitely many subintentions with an infinitely increasing degree of intricacy.

<sup>5</sup> The way Schiffer writes it out is appropriate insofar as it in fact removes all possible counterexamples, but it is inappropriate insofar as it entails sheer humbug: this analysis requires that *S* utter *x* thereby intending [to bring about a certain state of affairs whose obtainment is (intended by *S* to be) sufficient for] *S* himself to believe that [this state of affairs obtains and is at least good evidence that] he utters *x* intending to produce *r* in *A*. Cf. Schiffer (1972, 39).

Since Schiffer, in effect, requires that *S*, in uttering *x*, intends lots of things to be mutually believed by *S* and *A*, infinitely many of such strange statements are entailed by his definition. The crucial point is: if *S*, by doing something, intends some proposition *p* to be – in Schiffer's sense – mutually believed by *A* and himself, then he does what he does intending thereby *himself* to believe (1) that *p*, (2) that *A* believes that *p*, (3) that *A* believes that he believes that *p*, and so on. It is of no great help to ascribe to *S* the less ambitious intention that *A* believe certain things to be mutually believed by *S* and *A*. This would only shift the difficulty to another point: in that case *S* would intend *A* to believe (1) that *A* believes that *p*, (2) that *A* believes that *S* believes that *p*, (3) that *A* believes that *S* believes that *A* believes that *p*, and so on. There is no reason to ascribe to *S* such intentions, just because he means something by what he does. In fact, there are good reasons not to ascribe them to him anyway. This sort of difficulty could be avoided by requiring *S* only to intend *A* to satisfy his part of the relevant mutual belief between *S* and *A*. (As for myself, I prefer to avoid it by doing without such epistemic monsters as Schiffer's so-called "mutual belief".)

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed justification of these claims, especially those put forward against position (d), see Kemmerling (1979).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Grice (1969, 159).

<sup>8</sup> She does not fulfil 4a–4c, since she intends *A* to rely on the second of the italicized "inference-elements"; this intention is irreconcilable with 4c and, *a fortiori*, with 4b and 4a.

<sup>9</sup> Here I rely on a procedure of clarifying the logical relations between all sentences of this type (which are possible at any degree of intricacy of the relevant sort) developed by Wolfgang Spohn. For details cf. his appendix to Kemmerling (1979).

<sup>10</sup> This way of eliminating the counterexamples has, in effect, been proposed by Jonathan Bennett (1976, 127).

<sup>11</sup> Actually, I am not satisfied with the analysis even as it then stands. In an account I offered elsewhere, the concept of intention is eliminated in favour of the concepts of belief and desire, and the Gricean analysis is reconstructed as a part of a theory of a special sort of communication, namely rational communication by means of devices which lack an immediately relevant natural meaning-connection with what is communicated. On this somewhat more articulate account, 1 and a slightly weakened version of 2 are reconstructable from *S*'s desire to produce *r* in *A* together with his (Gricean) assumptions about how to achieve this conveniently. Instead of the intention described by 3 this reconstruction contains a belief with the same content. (The importance of that belief is reflected by the special role it plays in the practical argument by which *S* is led to utter *x*.) In particular, this account shows that the counterexamples are not so very important after all. At least they do less harm to the basic points of Grice's analysis than some of the attempts to get rid of them. Cf. Kemmerling (1979).

<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Clara Seneca and Mark Helme for checking and improving my English.



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