“MEANING”
RECONSTRUCTED:
GRICE AND THE
NATURALIZING OF
SEMANTICS

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Introduction

What is it that allows acoustic sounds or written symbols to be meaningful? How, in a world of physical objects and events, do some physical items - so-called “linguistic signs” - come to ‘represent’, or ‘be about’ extra-linguistic items? What is the place of linguistic meaning in the natural order? There are several ways to understand these questions, and many ways to answer them. Over the past few decades, philosophers of language and mind have tried to address these questions by engaging in an on-going attempt to ‘naturalize’ meaning and, more broadly, intentionality. My aim in this paper is to re-examine Paul Grice’s proposed answers to these questions, in order to determine whether, and to what extent Grice’s work can contribute to the contemporary project of naturalizing semantics.

In his seminal article “Meaning”, Grice outlined an explanation of linguistic meaning in terms of speaker intentions. Later works by Grice and his followers developed the ideas of “Meaning” into what has come to be known as “the Gricean account of language.” That account contains two key ingredients. The first idea is that so-called “speaker meaning” - what a speaker means by an expression - is logically prior to “public meaning” - what an expression standardly means in a public language. The second idea is that the notion of speaker meaning can be understood
in terms of speakers’ intentions (of a special kind). The claim of the priority of speaker meaning over public meaning is endorsed by contemporary views on meaning as diverse as Jerry Fodor’s and Donald Davidson’s. And the second idea has also found its way into current discussions of meaning, in the form of the expectation that semantic facts could be reduced to psychological facts. Such a reduction is often thought to constitute a necessary first stage in a non-skeptical naturalist account of linguistic meaning. At the same time, many believe that Grice’s proposals in “Meaning” have long been buried under decisive objections.

This paper is an attempt to revive Grice’s main ideas by motivating and articulating in detail a particular construal of the Gricean account. On this construal, Grice’s account is seen as a ‘genetic’ rational reconstruction of the origins of linguistic meaning. It purports to explain how linguistic meaning could come about, rather than give an analysis of the concept of meaning by, say, providing necessary and sufficient conditions for a speaker meaning something by an everyday utterance. I believe this way of construing the Gricean account can render it immune to many of the objections that have plagued it over the years while preserving its interest for semantic naturalists.

I begin with a brief review of the main ideas in Grice’s “Meaning” and of the motivation behind attempts to reduce public meaning to speaker meaning (Section 1). I then develop and motivate the ‘genetic’ construal of the Gricean program (Section 2), and argue that it can avoid some of the main objections to the program (Section 3). In the final section (4), I discuss a remaining objection to Grice, the so-called “circularity objection”. The discussion will provide an answer to my central question: what help can a Gricean account of meaning offer to the project of naturalizing semantics?

1. “Public” Meaning and “Speaker” Meaning

1A. Grice’s “MEANING”

Grice’s “Meaning” begins by distinguishing two notions of meaning, natural and nonnatural meaning. Intuitively, natural meaning is the kind of meaning had by natural signs, or symptoms (as in “Dark clouds mean rain”; or “These red spots mean measles”). Nonnatural meaning is, paradigmatically, the kind of meaning accorded to (more or less) conventional signs (as in “Three rings mean that the bus is full”, or “Apples and pears means stairs in Cockney rhyming slang”). Where nonnatural meaning is concerned, it makes sense to talk of someone meaning something. So Grice proposes, as a first substantive step, that we answer the question how public, conventional signs (such as expressions in a natural language) have their meanings by answering the question how speakers can mean things by utterances.6,7

As a second step, Grice proposes that we understand speaker meaning in terms of speakers’ special communicative intentions. On his proposal, meaningful utterances are a species of intentional actions used as tools, or means for achieving certain purposes. The trick is to find a characterization of the relevant intentions which would highlight utterances as carrying nonnatural meanings and not merely as effective, useful, etc. tools for achieving various purposes.

Suppose a speaker presents an audience with St. John the Baptist’s head to inform them that he is dead. Or suppose your close friend shows you a picture of your girlfriend being intimate with someone else to convince you she is cheating on you. (See Grice (1967: 43f.) Or: I open the window so you can see that it is raining outside. In all three cases the intentional acts I perform would constitute (under normal conditions) a very effective means of achieving my purpose. And the speakers in these cases do seem engaged in some sort of communicative behavior – viz., intentionally and openly letting someone know that such-and-such. Yet it seems wrong to regard them as meaning that such-and-such by their utterances (perhaps for the same reason that it would be wrong to see them as meaning that such-and-such if they were to deploy a more direct means of achieving the desired effect, such as tampering with the audience’s nervous system, or otherwise directly altering their ‘belief box’).

Suppose, instead, that the speaker points the audience to a picture of St. John the Baptist and makes the slit-throat gesture. Or your friend discretely draws for you a picture of the girlfriend with the other guy. Or I tell you that it is raining outside. Here, the intentional acts of utterance – and the audience’s recognition of the intention behind them – would form a crucial element in producing the relevant belief in the audience. Whereas in the previous cases the speaker’s intention (and the audience’s recognition of it) is immaterial to the production of the intended effect. The head’s lying on a plate, the photograph’s lying on the table, the window being blown open, would normally suffice for the production of the desired effect independently of the speaker’s communicative intervention. Thus, there is a clear difference between the two groups of cases in the way the intended effect is achieved (in our examples – in the way the relevant beliefs are transmitted).

We can put the difference this way: in the first group of cases, the speaker’s communicative intention – to transmit a certain belief to the audience – is idle. There is no need for the audience to recognize it in order to ‘get the message’, and, correspondingly, no point to the speaker’s intending the audience to recognize the intention. By contrast, in the second group of cases, because there is little likelihood that the intended effect would be produced without the audience’s recognition
of the speaker's intention, the speaker relies on that recognition. As Grice puts it,

the [audience's] recognition is intended by A to play its part in inducing the belief, and if it does not do so something will have gone wrong with the fulfillment of A's intentions. Moreover, A's intending that the recognition should play this part implies, I think, that he assumes that there is some chance that it will in fact play this part, that he does not regard it as a foregone conclusion that the belief will be induced in the audience whether or not the intention behind the utterance is recognized. (1967: 45; my emphasis)

Grice's insight, then, is to distinguish between speakers' nonnaturally meaningful utterances and their superficially similar but merely 'causal' cousins by seeing the former as essentially involving non-idle communicative intentions. It is this insight which Grice attempts to capture by introducing a 'reflexive' element into his original analysis of meaning:

To say that S meant something by U is to say that S intended the utterance of U to produce some effect in an audience by means of the audience’s recognition of this very intention. (See Grice 1967: 46, my emphasis)

On this analysis, S's utterance is nonnaturally meaningful only if S regards the recognition of his intention in uttering U as necessary for the achievement of his communicative goals.  

Once the analysis of speaker meaning in terms of special communicative intentions is in place, Grice hopes to explain public meaning in terms of speaker meaning. The Gricean analysis of speaker meaning is insufficient to account for public or standard meaning in two crucial ways. First, the meaning of a public language utterance is timeless: what an expression means in a language (unlike what an expression refers to, or whether a sentence is true, or appropriate) does not in general depend on the occasion in which it is used. Secondly, the meaning of a public language utterance is structured: with the exception of basic vocabulary items, expressions of a public language have discernible semantic (as well as syntactic) structure.

In “Meaning”, Grice only hints at the possibility of accommodating timelessess: “x means_{NN} (timeless) that so-and-so” might at a first shot be equated with some statement or disjunction of statements about what “people” (vague) intend (with qualifications about ‘recognition’) to effect by x.” (1967: 46). In a later article (1968), this suggestion is modified. Building and improving upon Grice's modified definition, and exploiting some central aspects of David Lewis' work on convention (1969), Schiffer has proposed the following Gricean analysis of timeless meaning:

X (timeless) means that p in [group] C if and only if there prevails in C a convention or set of conventions Z such that any member of C acts in accordance with Z only if he utters

On this proposed analysis, then, timeless meaning is conventionalized (Gricean) speaker meaning. And, once the Gricean accommodates structure, we would have a complete analysis of the standard meaning of any expression in a public language in terms of conventionalized Gricean use of linguistic devices by a population. (We shall return to this in section 2.c. below.)

(1.B.) SOME COMMON CONSTRUALS OF GRICE'S "MEANING"

The program Grice initiated in “Meaning” has been taken by many to lay the conceptual foundations for “Intention-Based Semantics” which constitutes a two-part program. One part involves analyzing standard expression-meaning (what we called above 'public meaning') in terms of certain regularities in acts of speaker-meaning that are explicable without appeal to public meaning. The other part involves analyzing speaker-meaning in non-semantic, psychological terms. Executing this two-part program would effect a reduction of the semantic to the psychological.

The prospects of such a reduction should be particularly attractive for the naturalist who refuses to take semantic facts as irreducible, brute features of the world. Semantic facts, many believe, must supervene on more basic facts, facts having to do with the use speakers make of linguistic expressions. A proper reduction of semantic to psychological facts would accord well with that belief. Now, physicalists are committed to explaining both the semantic and the psychological in non-semantic, nonmentalistic terms. But they should still welcome the possibility of a reduction of the semantic to the psychological as a crucial first stage in their account of meaning, to be followed later by a reduction of the psychological to the physical. Thus, although Grice himself, as well as some of his followers, may not share in the physicalist’s global reduction plan, the Gricean two-part analysis of linguistic meaning in terms of speaker intentions seems apt to serve some of the physicalist’s needs.

Partly due to Grice’s own presentation in “Meaning”, the accounts he offers of speaker meaning and of public meaning have been regularly taken as definitions, or conceptual analyses. Grice has been seen as attempting to specify logically necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the concept of meaning. Notoriously, philosophical analyses attempting to provide such conditions are very difficult to maintain, as it seems fairly easy to construct counter-examples which threaten either side of the biconditional analysis. Indeed, many of the standard objections to Grice have taken this form, seeking to establish that the Gricean conditions are either logically non-necessary or logically
insufficient for the applicability of our notion of (speaker or public) meaning as we normally employ it (see below).

A somewhat weaker reading of Grice will have him attempting to specify merely constitutively necessary and sufficient conditions for meaning. Whereas on the stronger reading the Gricean analysis offers a philosophical 'translation' of claims involving the notion of meaning, on the weaker reading, the analysis would purport to answer the question: What conditions must obtain in the world in order for utterances to have the meanings they have? Accordingly, we would see the analysis as telling us that an utterance's having a particular public or standard meaning is (roughly) constituted by speakers of the relevant group conventionally using it to express the corresponding speaker meaning. And a speaker's making an utterance with a particular speaker meaning is constituted by the speaker's having the proper Gricean intentions.

The constitutive reading is still open to two sets of objections which plague the stronger reading. As regards public meaning, it has been argued (by, e.g., Ziff 1967) that public meanings, as a matter of fact, do not exhibit the dependence on speaker intentions required by the two-part Gricean analysis. Many English sentences have never been, nor ever will be uttered. Ipso facto there are no Gricean speaker intentions associated with them. Yet they do have standard, public meaning. As regards speaker meaning, note that on the constitutive reading the conditions specified must be met by actual speakers in order for them to be properly said to express relevant speaker meanings. But, as many have argued, it is psychologically unrealistic to credit speakers with the intentions specified in the Gricean analysis. This seems especially true with respect to later versions of the analysis, which, in order to meet counter-examples, invoked ever more complicated 'nested' intentions.

This last problem of 'psychological reality' is particularly acute if we recall the attraction the Gricean account holds for those who seek a reduction of the semantic to the psychological. The prospects of this reduction depend on the feasibility of ascribing to speakers the requisite Gricean intentions. The more complex the intentions are, the less feasible it would seem to regard them as involved in actual ordinary speech situations, and the less attractive the proposed reduction would seem. Several authors have addressed the psychological reality problem. But their attempts ignore what seems to be the heart of the complaint, which is neatly characterized by Simon Blackburn.18

The Gricean mechanism with its complex communicative intentions has a clear point in what Blackburn calls "a one-off predicament" — a situation in which an individual needs to get her audience to believe (or be informed of) something, but can rely on no shared means of communication. In such a situation, the speaker has to do something which her audience is likely to take in one specific way, and the obvious thing to do would be
to perform some action with the intention that the audience realize why it is being performed (see op.cit., p. 112). But, as Blackburn points out, the Gricean mechanism seems to lose its point "once we have habits of taking utterances one way or another"; "conventions or habits would not need to fossilize complex Gricean conditions — they would supplant the Gricean mechanism, which is only needed in their absence" (op.cit., p. 113). In other words, once conventions or communicative habits are in place, Gricean intentions would become idle (see above, (1a.)), precisely because other mechanisms will be available for achieving the desired communicative purposes.19

The foregoing speaks to both the necessity and the sufficiency of the Gricean conditions (taken as either logical or constitutive conditions). As regards necessity, the point is not so much that we cannot credit speakers in ordinary communicative situations with the relevant complex Gricean intentions. Rather, it is that once conventional means of transmitting information are available, such intentions become idle, so that as Griceans we ought not to see them as grounding meaning. And, as regards sufficiency, if we suppose Gricean intentions present on particular occasions where communicative conventions are already in place, we can see that the speaker meaning which those intentions support would be overridden by the meaning the conventions dictate. We shall return to this below (in section 3).20


Whereas in "Meaning" Grice's stated task was to capture the difference between natural and nonnatural meaning, in "Meaning Revisited" (1989) Grice claims he wants to set up a position that represents cases of nonnatural meaning as being descendant from ... derivative from and analogous to, cases of natural meaning". The position holds that "natural meaning is in some specifiable way the ancestor of nonnatural meaning" (1989, 292). This can serve as a starting point for our proposed construal. On the construal to be articulated here, Grice is offering an account of how linguistic meaning — which is a special kind of nonnatural meaning — could arise in a world in which natural meaning can already be found. Seen in this way, the account is not taken as a conceptual analysis of our ordinary notion of meaning; it is not committed to providing a philosophical translation of ordinary statements about meaning into logically equivalent statements about speakers' intentions. Nor is it taken to provide a set of constitutive, necessary and/or sufficient conditions on every production of a meaningful utterance.21
I believe that the two pillars of Grice’s account – the claim that public meaning can be explained in terms of speaker meaning, and the claim that speaker meaning can be explained in terms of special communicative intentions – gain much greater plausibility if we bear in mind what can be described as the question of genesis. How could natural language expressions come to have (nonnatural) meanings in the first place? That is, how is it possible for nonnatural linguistic meaning to appear on the natural scene? My Gricean takes these questions as an invitation to tell a plausible story about how – in a world in which there are only natural objects (people included) and the relations among them – linguistic meaning could come to be.22

One advantage of the ‘genetic’ construal of the Gricean account, as we shall see later, is that it would allow it to bypass systematically a host of common objections.23 But, as we shall now see, the search for a Gricean ‘genesis of meaning’ story can also be independently motivated.

(2A) MOTIVATING THE ‘GENETIC’ SCENARIO

In our natural world, dark clouds are correlated with subsequent rain. Certain red spots on the skin are correlated with the presence of measles. The different states of closure of certain plants’ petals are correlated with the air’s temperature. In such cases, unlike in the case of a correlation we might see between lines drawn in the sand by a crawling ant and the shape of a face (cf. Putnam (1981:1)), there are systematic, non-accidental and direct causal connections between the correlata. For this reason, we may be inclined to speak in such cases (but not in the case of the ant) of one correlatum representing the other.

We may (with Putnam, op. cit., Ch.1) insist that representation is always representation for someone – that it makes no sense to speak of one thing representing another in the absence of actual or potential interpreters. Still, we can recognize that such representational relations as we may acknowledge in the petals’ case and its kin are natural, in the sense that one correlatum (e.g., the shape and color of clouds) can be taken by an interpreter to be a ‘natural sign’ for the other correlatum (the ensuing presence of rain), since the latter is a natural consequence of the former. By contrast, the representational relations between basic elements of an artificial symbolic language and what they represent are deliberately and arbitrarily set up by us, through explicit definitions and rules.

Now, unlike items in an artificially constructed symbol systems, words of a natural language do not in general have their representational properties as a result of anyone’s conscious, explicit decision. On the other hand, they are not purely a matter of causally grounded natural correlations. Expressions of a natural language can retain their meanings in the face of indefinite variation in the causes of uttering them.24 The task

for anyone seeking to naturalize semantics is thus a complicated one: to explain the meaningfulness of natural language expressions in terms of natural properties and relations, while heeding the potential ‘causal detachedness’ of linguistic representation just noted.

According to the story I propose to tell on Grice’s behalf, linguistic meaningfulness can be located on a continuum running from natural representation systems to artificial (or invented) symbolic systems. Its emergence is not a mysterious, unexplainable cosmic event, but is rather something that can be reconstructed, by considering its forerunners in the natural order.

We should briefly mention one potential forerunner: the often-discussed communication system of the honey-bees.25 Honey-bee dances have representational properties: there are non-coincidental, causally grounded correlations between aspects of the dances and certain environmental features (location, direction and concentration of nectar). Unlike natural representations (such as the petals’ example we saw earlier), the information carried by bee dances has (obvious) natural consumers; bee dances are designed to communicate information from dancing bees to observing bees. In addition, bee dances are ‘productive’: they are capable of communicating ever-new information. For these reasons, the honey-bee communication system may seem a natural precursor of human languages.26

However, bee dances — much like information-transmitting neuron firings — still seem to belong in the realm of what Grice calls natural meaning. A particular bee dance could be seen as a natural sign for the presence of nectar (in such-and-such concentration at such-and-such a distance and direction), although the signalling relation here would be more indirect than in the clouds/rain case, in that it is mediated by an elaborate system programmed into the bees through adaptive evolution. Still, the dances can be thought of as natural consequences of what they ‘report’, since they exhibit causally grounded co-variation with certain environmental features. Non-naturally meaningful utterances, on the other hand, seem to amount to more than biologically standardized means of transmitting of information, and (as noted earlier) characteristically exhibit a certain causal ‘detachedness’ absent from the bee dances.

It might be suggested that the reason we are not inclined to see bee dances as possessing nonnatural meaning is that we do not think of the dancing bee as meaning anything by her dance or of the dancer’s mates as understanding the dance. And that in turn is because we cannot think of the bee as trying to tell something to her mates, and of her mates as interpreting or figuring out what the dancing bee is trying to say. However elaborate and fascinating bee dances are, we do not take the transmission or reception of the information they convey to manifest an even mildly rich mental life of thoughts, beliefs, desires, intentions, etc.27 However, it might be thought, the emergence of linguistic meaning is linked to the

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presence of intelligence and of rationality. The Gricean story attempts to capture this link.

(28.) THE GRICEAN STORY: MEANING AND RATIONALITY

The question in front of us now is this: in what way precisely does the Gricean story connect the appearance of linguistic meaning on the natural scene with intelligence and rationality? To get properly started with the Gricean story, we must consider creatures who are mentally more advanced than the bees, to whom we might be willing to ascribe some beliefs and desires, though not yet language. No doubt, such creatures can exhibit bits of behavior—like scratching, sneezing, yelping—which carry information about various of the creatures’ states, which information can be transmitted from one creature to another. Such bits of behavior can be thought to have natural meaning. But now let us suppose that, unlike in the bee case, the creatures in our story do not possess a system set up in them by nature for the transmission of information. In a sense, the point of our story is to see whether, being as mentally complex as we have allowed them to be, they could develop for themselves such a system, one, however, whose elements—in distinction from bee dances—do possess linguistic meaning.

In “Meaning Revisited”, Grice takes the following as our initial case of natural meaning: we have some creature X who nonvoluntarily produces a certain piece of behavior, “the production of which means, or has the consequence, or evidences, that [say] X is in pain” (1989: 292). Grice’s task is to see whether we can modify this case in stages “so as to end up with something which is very much like nonnatural meaning” (ibid.). And he offers the following six stages:

Stage 1: Our creature X produces voluntarily a piece of behavior whose nonvoluntary production would evidence that the creature is in some state. E.g., X emits a yelp in order that his audience, Y, come to think he is in pain (thereby exploiting the natural connection between pain and yelping, of which he is aware, and knows, or believes, his audience is aware).

Stage 2: The audience Y recognizes X’s behavior to be a voluntary performance whose involuntary performance would evidence pain. Here, Y realizes that X is simulating pain-behavior, which would naturally tend to undermine his belief that X is actually in pain.

Stage 3: We can now add that Y also realizes that X intends him to recognize his performance as voluntary. This should allow Y to see X’s act as open, and not deceitful. We now have X faking a bit of behavior yet clearly indicating the behavior is faked, which may lead Y to wonder why X is doing that.

Stage 4: Y supposes that X is engaging in some kind of game, and takes it that he, Y, is expected to make some contribution.

Stage 5: But suppose Y cannot figure out what contribution he is to make to the game, or that particular contributions he offers receive no encouraging responses. Y may conclude that X is not engaging in a game, but rather is trying to get Y to believe (or pay attention to the fact) that he is in the state which normally produces involuntarily the behavior X is exhibiting. So here Y recognizes that X (a) intends in the first place that Y recognize the production of what is a natural sign of pain to be voluntary, and also (b) intends that Y should take intention (a) to be a sufficient reason for believing X is in pain.

At this point we have a transmission of information which has a special character: it involves a rather intricate set of interlocking intentions and recognitions of intentions. We already have here the makings of Gricean nonnatural speaker meaning—meaning grounded in special speaker intentions. But in the case we have imagined, you might wonder: why would X resort to such perverse intentional behavior? Why not simply let out the natural expression of pain—the yelp—so as to allow the relevant information to be transmitted naturally? Well, there may be reasons for X not to let out the natural yelp. (Grice considers the following: “that it would be ... uncreately, for X to produce naturally a natural expression of pain, or that X’s nonnatural production of an expression of pain is not to be supposed to indicate every feature which would be indicated by a natural production” — e.g., the degree of pain (1989: 295)). But in any event, as Grice notes, this problem would not arise “if X’s performance ... were rather something more loosely connected with the state of affairs (not necessarily a state of X) which it is intended to convey to Y” (ibid.). In such a case, we would reach:

Stage 6: X uses some communication vehicle which is not a natural sign of the message that it is used to convey. Instead, X will now be using a bit of behavior or some other device which has some connection which he believes to be discernible by Y with a particular piece of information.

Once a wide range of such communication devices is available, our creatures should be on their road to human language as we know it. This road is, of course, the road from speaker meaning to full-fledged linguistic (‘conventional’, ‘semantic’) meaning, to which we shall return shortly. But at this point, it is worth elaborating a bit on the stage of Grice’s sketchy scenario in which speaker meaning emerges.

We will do well to construct in more detail a case in which, as Grice suggests, the communication device is more loosely connected to the piece of information it is supposed to transmit than in the above yelp-pain case. Let us imagine that, in a languageless world, our creature X, an intelligent, rational being, wishes to communicate a message to Y, another being like him. Suppose X has learned of the presence of poisonous berries by noticing birds eating them and subsequently dropping dead (cf. my (1992: Sec 5)). We can now imagine an occasion
develop conventional ways of correlating features of utterances with features of the world (or, perhaps, with features of beliefs about the world). What is needed is a standardized system of devices consisting of (a) a rich (though finite) set of elementary devices — a vocabulary — and (b) a finite set of combinatory operations, which together allow the formation of an infinite set of complex communication vehicles.

I believe extant discussions by Griceans of convention and structure contain the necessary ingredients for charting on Grice's behalf a plausible course which rational agents could take from making utterances endowed with (Gricean) speaker meanings to having a conventional system of communicative devices as described above. My contribution to these discussions here will be to draw the main consequences of regarding the emergence of conventions, as well as that of speaker meanings, as stages in a 'genetic' rational reconstruction of natural language.

The 'genetic' scenario's route to natural language is rife with speaker intentions. The appearance of speaker meaning, which marks one significant stage — the move to nonnatural meaning — is contingent upon the development of the right sort of other-directed, non-idle reflexive intentions. And conventions, whose appearance marks another significant stage — the move to standardized meaning — are born of intentional actions designed to achieve certain goals for rational speakers. However, once speakers have 'graduated' to a full-fledged language, meaningful communication among them no longer needs to be grounded in Gricean intentions. Once we have firm linguistic ground on which to stand, we can (to coin a phrase ...) kick away the Gricean ladder. Accounting for the emergence of conventional language in Gricean terms does not commit us to understanding ordinary communication involving such language in those terms. Once we have found a Gricean way of getting language into the picture, we can, as it were, rub out the Gricean traces from it.

On the 'genetic' construal, Grice's account of speaker meaning is only intended to highlight the role that rational agents' intentions play in the introduction of nonnatural meaning into the natural scene. Nonnatural meaning can emerge when prelinguistic rational agents capable of transmitting information and altering other agents' beliefs begin to notice their ability to do so, and begin to care about the ways in which the information is transmitted to their audience — when they develop reflexive communicative intentions. Speaker meaning understood in such psychological terms may be necessary (or at least useful) only for understanding the beginning of language, but not for understanding how language operates at present. Indeed, it may not even be necessary for understanding how children become initiated into the practice of speaking a natural language. In linguistic matters, ontogeny need not recapitulate phylogeny. We may still regard speaker meaning as more basic than, or prior to

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public meaning, but only in the sense that it precedes it in the rational reconstruction of the origins of language.

From the point of view of the 'diachronic' Gricean story, it may well be implausible to try to find Gricean speaker intentions around every current semantic corner. When we think of language 'synchronically', the figuring out of speaker meaning – 'interpretation' properly so-called – is needed only when conventional meaning is unavailable, as when we have no common language with the speaker; or when the speaker clearly deviates from it, as in the case of malapropisms, metaphors, irony, implicatures, etc. When all is normal, and we are conversing with a fellow speaker, a member of our linguistic community, conventional meaning prevails, and speaker meaning is in important ways dependent on it. But all this can be accepted by the Gricean, provided that we do not regard the Gricean account as attempting to expose something hidden beneath the flow of normal everyday linguistic communication.

A related, though subtler point can be made regarding convention. As with the emergence of speaker meaning, we should regard the emergence of linguistic convention as a stage in a group's route to language. From the point of view of the ordinary everyday use and learning of a natural language, convention, too, can be thought of as buried deep in the past of linguistic devices. There is no need to ascribe to speakers participating in ordinary speech transactions, or to children becoming participants in linguistic communication, thoughts, intentions, beliefs, expectations, etc. of the kind invoked in the Lewisian/Gricean account of convention. In a 'synchronic' account of natural languages, we need not take contemporary speakers of, say, English, or French, to be (individually) maintaining linguistic regularities qua conventions. We need not credit them with knowingly conforming to the regularities, or with having mutual expectations and preferences about conformity to the conventions, seen as effective means of achieving communication (or solving various coordination problems). It may, however, be useful to think in those terms when trying to account for linguistic change, just as it is useful to bring in speaker intentions when trying to account for deviations from standard meaning. In both cases, the account of origins may help illuminate aspects of linguistic situations where something has gone awry. But when neither deviation nor change are at work, we need not think of a natural language as handled by its current speakers – or handed down to novices – as a set of conventions which represent 'fossilized' speaker intentions.

(23) UNDERSTANDING THE STATUS OF THE 'GENETIC' SCENARIO

A crucial aspect of the reading advocated here is the denial that the Gricean account aims to provide a 'synchronic' explanation of linguistically meaningful utterances, or to reflect the (current) structure of all semantic goings-on. The 'genetic' reading denies that the account is intended to reveal the present logical/constitutive conditions under which a given utterance should count as meaningful rather than meaningless, or the conditions under which it should count as having this rather than that particular meaning. Instead, it sees Grice as offering a 'diachronic' story about nonnatural meaning, one which attempts to specify conditions for the genesis of meaningfulness.

Now, of course, we are not to take this story as attempting to uncover actual historical conditions. It is not, for example, advanced as an empirical hypothesis of evolutionary biology. And the story would not be vitiated if it were somehow discovered that the actual facts did not bear it out. So what precisely is its status? My suggestion is that it should be seen as a rational reconstruction of the conditions under which language could emerge. The importance of this for our purposes lies in the fact that, in general, elements that play a role in a rational reconstruction of x's genesis need not play a role in a conceptual/constitutive analysis of x. For, crudely, elements thought to explain x's genesis need not have left a trace, as it were, in x's present composition or in our ordinary concept of x.

However, rational reconstructions may still come in two different varieties. A 'genetic' story of the sort told above, while not purporting to track down actual historical conditions, may still be taken to have quasi-empirical ambitions. By this I mean that it is possible (and even natural) to read the 'genetic' story as a reconstruction of a path languageless creatures (like our distant ancestors) might plausibly take to get to language. (A good example of this kind of quasi-empirical reconstruction can be found in Quine's 'ontogenetic' account of how a child acquires the referential apparatus of her language; see (1960: Ch. 3) and (1974: esp. Introduction).)

But now, in "Meaning Revisited", Grice says he does not intend his attempted six-stage 'derivation' of nonnatural meaning from natural meaning to provide "a historical or genetic account of the development of communication and language"; it is rather intended as "a myth designed, among other things, to exhibit the conceptual link between natural and nonnatural meaning" (1989: 296f.) Grice goes on to ask: "how can such a link be explained by a myth? This question is perhaps paralleled, ..., by the question how the nature and validity of political obligation (or perhaps even of moral obligation) can possibly be explained by a mythical social contract", and declares this a "problem for another day" (op. cit., 297). But if we take the comparison to the social contract case seriously, the 'genetic' Gricean story may be seen to have a different status from a quasi-empirical one.

Social contract theories attempt to reconstruct the conditions for the emergence of political (or ethical) norms without thereby being committed to the claim that these conditions play a role in the conceptual/constitutive
rationality — could command the semantic naturalist’s attention. Determining this matter would require a much closer analysis of the Gricean myth and a more careful comparison between it and the social contract myth than we can afford here. And that must remain, as Grice puts it, “a problem for another day”. (One relevant consideration is the following disanalogy between the social contract and the semantic case: theorists of meaning are not concerned to justify the linguistic norms and institutions.) Since the quasi-empirical understanding is the one that seems much more promising from a naturalist’s perspective, I shall presuppose it in the remainder of this paper.

3. The ‘Genetic’ Scenario and Objections to Grice

The ‘genetic’ construal of the Gricean project (even when understood quasi-empirically) renders its reductive ambitions fairly minimal. And this should increase its ability to cope with objections. In this section, I shall indicate briefly how the construal would allow the Gricean to address or bypass four major types of objections. This will serve to further explicate the construal advocated here.

(3A.) COUNTER-EXAMPLES TO THE BICONDITIONAL ANALYSIS OF SPEAKER MEANING

Many of the standard objections to Grice have taken the form of counter-examples to the analysis, thought of as a biconditional providing necessary and sufficient conditions for nonnatural speaker meaning. The counter-example literature is too vast for us to review here. We shall settle for a few general comments, which should suffice for our purposes. The counter-examples are broadly divided into two groups: those which aim to undermine the sufficiency of the Gricean conditions, and those designed to undermine their necessity. Against sufficiency: In this group, we find cases where the Gricean conditions on speaker meaning are met — the speaker has the requisite intentions — but where we would not say the speaker meant by the utterance what the analysis would predict. We briefly mention two such cases. Searle’s famous American soldier case (1969) and Strawson’s arranged ‘evidence’ case (1964) both fall in this group. In Searle’s case, an American soldier captured by Italians during WW1 is uttering a line from a German song (“Kennst Du das Land . . .”) with the intention that his captors come to believe that he is a German soldier via their recognition of his intention. The soldier meets the Gricean conditions on speaker meaning, but (intuitively) does not mean by those words that he is a German soldier. Strawson’s case is one in which a speaker arranges convincing-looking
'evidence' that $p$ in the presence of an audience knowing that her audience does not realize she knows that she is being watched. As Strawson has it, here too the speaker has the Gricean intentions but does not mean that $p$ by her act.\footnote{Grice and the Naturalizing of Semantics, 101}

Both cases involve a certain attempt on the speaker's part to deceive her audience. In the Searle case, the speaker apparently uses language to lead her audience to the erroneous belief that he is German. In the Strawson case, the speaker is manipulating an audience into having a certain belief. These examples seem to put into question the sufficiency of the Gricean conditions because it is built into them that the speaker in each case has the requisite intentions. Yet, intuitively, in neither case the speaker means by her utterance what she tries to get her audience to believe. Deception appears to frustrate communicative nonnatural meaning. If so, then nonnatural meaning would seem to require more than a reflexive Gricean intention to get someone to have a certain belief.

To capture this intuition, the Gricean account of speaker meaning has been modified by adding further, higher-order intentions on the part of speakers (thereby diminishing the plausibility of its claim to psychological reality). But the original Gricean analysis can probably benefit from a simpler modification proposed by Blackburn (1984: 115f.). In addition to having the intentions originally specified by Grice, a speaker who nonnaturally means that $p$ must also intend that nothing about her intentions be concealed. It is plausible to suppose that some such 'openness condition' must be imposed even in the one-off situation which marks the transition stage between natural and nonnatural meaning. And indeed, in Grice's six-stage story an openness condition is suggested at stage 3, where $Y$ (the audience) is described as realizing that $X$ (the speaker) intends $Y$ to see her utterance as voluntary (see above (2b)).

Against necessity: In the second group of counter-examples, we find a host of cases in which a speaker clearly means something by an utterance, but where it is plausible to think she does not meet the Gricean conditions on speaker meaning. Such cases come in two varieties.\footnote{Grice and the Naturalizing of Semantics, 101}

(a) Cases where the speaker does not intend to produce a belief (or other relevant responses) in her audience via the Gricean mechanism, e.g.: a student answering an examination question, or drawing an inference; a person confessing to a bad deed, or reminding someone of something, or accusing her audience of a lie; a teacher reviewing facts; etc.

(b) Cases where the speaker does not intend to produce a belief (or other relevant responses) in any particular audience, e.g.: writing in a diary, rehearsing for a speech or a play, giving a soiloquy, muttering to oneself, putting up warning signs.

The 'genetic' Gricean would argue that these sorts of alleged counter-examples feature linguistic activities that become possible only once language is already in place. This seems quite clear with respect to examples such as answering an exam question, drawing an inference, reviewing facts, writing in a diary, rehearsing for a speech in a play, or putting up warning signs. At the very least, these kinds of cases are best understood in the context of a public language. Speakers of a natural language can use language in many different ways, for a great variety of purposes. As indicated earlier, once a group has a public language, the Gricean mechanism can be bypassed in all sorts of ways. But our Gricean is not committed to the claim that her conditions are necessary to account for everyday uses of language. In the standard case, even what a speaker means by her words can be determined by the rules governing the public language she uses, and need not be 'grounded in' Gricean intentions.

To argue against the necessity of Grice's conditions understood 'genetically', one would have to show that in the original, pure 'one-off' case, where no public language is in the picture, there can be nonnatural meaning even in the absence of the Gricean conditions. For instance, it might be thought that a speaker should be able to mean something nonnaturally by an utterance in a pure 'one-off' case without trying to induce a belief in an audience (as the Gricean requires). But notice that it is not enough that there be no audience around for the speaker to address. In order for the Gricean conditions to be vitiated, it must be that the speaker in the imagined situation is making the transition from natural to nonnatural meaning without trying to communicate a message to anyone, not even to her future self. While I do not think conceiving of such a case is logically impossible, I do believe it involves various difficulties.\footnote{Grice and the Naturalizing of Semantics, 101} In any event, I think the 'genetic' Gricean's best strategy here is to acknowledge the logical possibility of alternative necessary conditions on nonnatural meaning, but insist that her opponents produce a plausible alternative scenario in which nonnatural meaning is achieved without any communicative intentions à la Grice. Until this is done, we can take Grice to have specified plausible conditions necessary for the transition from natural to nonnatural meaning.

(3b.) Objections to the 'Psychological Reality' of Gricean Intentions

Particularly serious from the naturalist's perspective is the objection that Gricean intentions are not psychologically real. We have already had some discussion of this objection earlier on in (1b.). In fact, attention to this objection is partly what motivates the 'genetic' construal. The objection has intuitive force: it is hard to think of speakers engaged in ordinary linguistic transactions as (necessarily) harboring Gricean intentions. And the 'genetic' construal respects this intuition. For, on that construal, there is no expectation that the Gricean mechanism be an active mechanism in everyday linguistic transactions.
Still, as hinted above (in 2c.)), our construal allows that the Gricean conditions on speaker meaning are sometimes met in current communicative situations. "One-off" occasions may arise: would-be communicators may lack a common means of communication, or may be unable to rely on it, for whatever reason. On such occasions, the Gricean mechanism may come into play to generate speaker meaning. Other candidates for speaker meaning mentioned before — malapropisms, metaphors, irony, implicatures — should not be treated as pure "one-off" cases, since in such cases the standard meaning of expressions figures prominently in the derivation of the relevant speaker meaning. Nevertheless, the derivation of speaker meaning in such cases resembles remarkably Grice's derivation of nonnatural from natural meaning, which has served as the basis for our construal (see above, 2b.)). Indeed, this resemblance hints at an underlying connection between two apparently disparate aspects of Grice's contribution to the philosophy of language: his account of speaker meaning and his account of implicatures. Both accounts (as well as the Gricean account of convention) explain the derivation of meaning in terms of interlocking speaker-hearer intentions and recognitions. And both appeal to broader principles of rationality.

In analogy to the psychological reality complaint about speaker meaning, one could raise an objection to the psychological implications of the Gricean account of convention. For instance, one of the requirements Lewis has introduced into his analysis of convention in response to counter-examples is that the relevant population should recognize the conventional status of the regularity (and know that others know it, and that they know that others know it, etc. — in a regress highly reminiscent of the regress involved in Grice's later modifications of his analysis of speaker meaning). Yet it can be objected that people can make use of conventional linguistic devices — such as word-order — while being ignorant about their status, and being prepared to make discoveries about it. The intuition here is that the ordinary use of conventional language by speakers does not betray — and need not involve — their having all the beliefs or expectations that the analysis of convention implicates. And the 'genetic' scenario — which sees the emergence of conventions as a rationally reconstructed stage on the way to language — can accommodate this intuition as well. As suggested before (end of 2c.)), from the point of view of the current use of a natural language, the conventionality of linguistic devices is (to borrow a phrase) a 'passing trait' of their history.

(3C) OBJECTIONS TO REDUCING PUBLIC MEANING TO SPEAKER MEANING

Another objection mentioned earlier (in 1b.)), raised by Ziff (as well as Platts (1979: 89g)), aims to undermine the Gricean attempt to account for public meaning in terms of speaker meaning. The objection is that

Gricean intentions are tied to actual and thus finite communicative situations, whereas public linguistic meanings are infinite, hence bound to outrun speakers' intentions.

This is fully accepted by the analysis as understood here. It is implausible, but also unnecessary, to expect direct analysis of sentences of a natural language in terms of speaker intentions. The emergence of full linguistic meaning is tied, on the 'genetic' story, to the appearance of conventions governing expressive devices other than whole utterances (vocabulary items and combinatory operations). Once such conventional devices are in the picture, linguistic meaning can get out of speakers' hands, as it were, and become fully 'autonomous'. The connection of the meaning of linguistic expressions to speaker intentions is, then, very indirect. In figuring out the meaning of a complex expression in an existing natural language we do not try to decipher directly the intentions with which speakers regularly use it. Rather, we compute (or construct) its meaning based on the meanings of its parts. All that our Gricean story requires is that a rational reconstruction of how the parts (and the combinatory rules) came to have their meanings in the first place will involve conventions, where these conventions in turn represent abstractions from fossilized (Gricean) speaker meanings of whole utterances.

The 'autonomy' of meaning is also such that there are serious limits on what speakers can mean by expressions in existing natural languages. One cannot say (as Wittgenstein imagines) "It's hot here" and mean "It's cold here" (or utter "Kunst Du das Land . . . " and mean "I am a German soldier", or yell "Gleeg gleeg gleeg!" and mean that it is raining in Tibet, for that matter) just by 'glomming onto' the words the right Gricean intentions. This can give the illusion that semantic meaning is not only irreducible to speaker meaning but actually determines it, and in that sense is prior to it. But, on the 'genetic' story, we should expect semantic meaning to gain priority in this way. Once a natural language is in place, its expressions are governed by certain conventions, which determine their meanings. It would take linguistic change to give expressions new meanings, and such changes are not effected by individual speakers on single occasions. And it may well be useful to think of such changes in Gricean terms (as involving speakers converging on a new speaker meaning, fossilizing it into convention, and so on). I conclude that examples that trade on the 'autonomy', 'resilience' or (apparent) priority of public meaning do not threaten the Gricean account understood 'genetically'.

(3D) OBJECTIONS THAT THE GRICEAN ANALYSIS FAILS TO CAPTURE WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT HUMAN LANGUAGE

An attractive feature of the 'genetic' construal of Grice is that it tells a story about the origins of language which allows for its continuity with
more primitive communication systems. Charles Taylor, has in effect opposed this very idea. Taylor believes there is a deep difference between animal and human communication, which belies any continuity view. Animal communication, he seems to think, can be appropriately characterized in terms of actions intended to transmit information, induce beliefs, or otherwise change in the behavior of other animals. Full-fledged human communication, on the other hand, has a different point: it aims at 'putting something on the table' ‘entre nous’ – making something ‘an object for us’ (the communicators). It concerns not only what gets across, but also how it gets across – the form of expression. This expressive aspect of human communication (which trades on our sensitivity not just to the subject matter but also to “how we are aware and who is aware” – a “reflexive dimension” (cf. (1980: 295)) eludes the Gricean reductive attempt, he thinks. This is because the Gricean theory presents human communication as just a different means (i.e., the Gricean mechanism) for “producing the same results” (e.g., beliefs or compliance) which animals attempt to produce.

You might think that this is not altogether fair to Grice. After all, from the very beginning, Grice emphasized that nonnatural meaning is different from natural meaning precisely in terms of the way information is transmitted. The introduction of the ‘reflexive intention’ (the intention that the audience recognize the speaker’s first intention) into Grice’s analysis of meaning seems to be motivated by an intuition not unlike Taylor’s, namely that, where nonnatural meaning is involved, the mechanism of transmission is important, not just the message transmitted. This is particularly evident if we pay attention to the requirement that the ‘reflexive intention’ not be idle (as we put it earlier, at the end of (1a)). But Taylor may insist that as long as human communication is thought of in the model of animal communication and its point is taken to be getting across information (or inducing belief, or action), albeit in a more sophisticated way, we are missing something crucial.

The Gricean telling the ‘genetic’ story, however, can concede that there is something special about human communication – linguistic communication is not simply a sophisticated way of ‘getting certain things done’. Once we have a language, a new form of communication becomes possible: distinctively human linguistic communication, whose point goes beyond the mere manipulation of human environment via inducing beliefs and actions in others. Once there is standardized language in place, human linguistic communication takes on a different character from animal communication – it acquires a ‘medium-dependent’, reflective/expressive dimension patently absent from animal communication. The Gricean story, then, can provide for continuity between human and animal communication while leaving room for something unique and distinctive about human communication.

4. Naturalizing Nonnatural Meaning?

While our construal of the Gricean project presents its reductive ambitions as comparatively minimal, it still endorses a certain priority claim – the ‘genetic’ priority (or precedence) of the psychological over the semantic. Without this claim, it seems, the Gricean project would be of little or no interest to the naturalist. But the cogency and even intelligibility of the priority claim has been questioned by opponents of Grice. We begin this section by recalling a major objection to the priority claim – the so-called “circularity objection”, which touches at the heart of naturalistic accounts of semantics. Our discussion of this objection will enable us to identify more precisely the extent to which the ‘genetic’ Gricean account can help the contemporary project of naturalizing semantics.

(4A.) THE PRIORITY CLAIM AND THE CIRCULARITY OBJECTION

The idea that there can be thought without and prior to language seems very compelling. Our ‘genetic’ construal of Grice captures this idea nicely, though minimally, by taking thought to precede language, at least in the evolutionary order. On the ‘genetic’ Gricean story, language is born of thought (intentions, beliefs, mutual expectations, etc.); the story purports to tell us how we might get to language – understood as a system of semantically structured, nonnaturally meaningful communicative devices – in a world in which natural meaning relations exist. But prominent accounts of intentions, beliefs – and the so-called propositional attitudes generally – analyze them as mental relations to public sentences. Pinning the development of language on the emergence of mental states so regarded threatens circularity. Even if the Gricean accepts that not all thought is possible prior to the development of language she must still require that some thought should be possible prior to language. But the ‘sentential account’ of propositional attitudes appears to rule out this possibility.

It may be that there is no difficulty here. The ‘sentential account’ of propositional attitudes is usually offered as an analysis of propositional attitude ascriptions. On one reading of it, ascriptions of the form ‘S believes/desires/etc. that p’ relate a subject S to a sentence in the ascriber’s language which means that p. But this analysis does not commit one to take S to be speaking the ascriber’s language, or, indeed, to be speaking any language at all (see Avramides (1989: 117f.). Ascriptions aside, however, the question remains: how are we to understand the idea – required for the ‘genetic’ Gricean story – that agents in a pre-linguistic ‘state of nature’ may be thought to have the communicative intentions which ground speaker meaning? (Remember: on the Gricean story, these agents must be endowed with fairly complex mental states, such as intending an audience to believe that p via the audience’s recognition of that very intention.)
account of semantic representation which is conducted, again as Rosenberg puts it “at a level undercuts the distinction ... between public language and thought”. Briefly, on Fodor's account, a realist ascription of propositional attitudes requires crediting subjects (human and non-human animals alike) with a language of thought (or “Mentalalese”) – an internal system of representation sharing with natural languages the essential features of systematicity, semantic compositionality and ‘robustness’. Thought – all thought – is explained as the manipulation of elements in this system. Given Fodor's language-of-thought hypothesis, "the intentionality of the attitudes reduces to the content of mental representations" (1987: 98). And “the naturalization problem” would be solved “if we were able to say, in nonintentional and nonsemantic idiom, what it is for a primitive symbol of Mentalalese to have a particular content (ibid.).

A Fodorian may (as Fodor does) subscribe to a Gricean account of the relationship between public and speaker meaning, taking a natural language to be “a system of conventions for the expression of communicative intentions” (see Fodor (1975: 106). But this is only to accept the more superficial aspect of the Gricean account as we have understood it. Insofar as the (‘genetic’) Gricean account takes the nonnatural meaningfulness of speaker meaning itself to be a consequence of speakers' special communicative intentions (and thus to constitute a descendant of natural meaning in the evolutionary order), the Fodorian must reject it.

It should be clear that the Fodorian view could not in the end endorse the claim of the priority of the psychological over the semantic, not even when that claim is understood in terms of ‘genetic’ precedence. The reason is this. It is true that the Fodorian view seeks to explain public linguistic meaning in terms of psychological states of speakers (specifically, their communicative intentions). However, it is committed to explaining intentional psychological states in terms of relations to mental representations. And these representations are themselves taken to have nonnatural semantic properties not as a consequence of intentional doings of speakers, but rather as a matter of certain nomic relations which (happen to?) hold between the representations and the worldly features they express. To this extent, the Fodorian view would reject the Gricean commitment to an ultimate account of nonnatural meaningfulness (even of speaker meaning) in terms of speakers' intentions. It rejects what I have identified above as the core reductive claim of the Gricean account, and can be seen to be using the Gricean account as mere icing on the semantic cake.

(4B.) ‘PRIMITIVE’ THOUGHT

A true ‘genetic’ Gricean who harbors naturalistic ambitions, then, must be able to account for the kinds of propositional attitudes which precede
natural meaning in the natural order without invoking nonnatural semantic properties of mental items. To do this, one must allow that at least some contentful mental states can have particular contents in a way that is not dependent on a subject's possessing a system of mental representations which (somehow) already possess nonnatural structured meanings.

Several Griceans have seemed to recognize this. Jonathan Bennett has offered to "describe kinds of non-linguistic behavior which would be best explained by supposing the agent to have certain intentions and beliefs" in such a way as to show "how these two concepts can have an active, coherent, working life in application to languageless creatures" (1976: 32, my emphasis). Since Bennett is not pursuing a program of logical behaviorism (see op.cit. section 10) - that is, he is not proposing to analyze languageless propositional attitudes in terms of the (dispositions to) non-linguistic behavior which would suffice for their attribution - it is legitimate to ask in what the having of propositional attitudes consists (especially in the languageless). This is a question taken up directly by another self-proclaimed Gricean, Brian Loar. Loar offers a functionalist answer to our question: A subject's having a particular thought, belief, etc. consists in her being in a psychological state which plays the relevant functional role, where being in such a state does not require already having a 'semantically endowed' language, not even a 'language of thought' (1981: esp. Ch. 4 and 9).

This view -- call it 'content functionalism' -- is also briefly suggested by Devitt and Sterelny (1987: 124ff) as a way of addressing the circularity problem. Couched in our terms, the idea would be this. Before we have nonnatural meaning on the scene, creatures are still capable of having contentful mental states which have their contents in virtue of playing certain functional (or 'conceptual') roles. The contents of these states (and not just their character as e.g., beliefs vs. intentions) are determined by the way they are interrelated and placed between environmental inputs and behavioral outputs. These contents would be inevitably very crude. They may well be no more finely discriminated than the contents of representations possessing natural meaning. Indeed, we could perhaps simply take them to be natural meanings. Thus, on this view, a creature without any semantically structured representation system, might still have an internal state which qualifies as e.g. a belief, where what makes the belief a belief that, say, there's food around (or that there's something edible, or that there are berries here, or ...) is (perhaps) the fact that it is caused by the presence of food and that it causes certain kinds of pursuing behavior (and other mental states).

Now, the Gricean idea would be that speaker nonnatural meaning becomes possible once a languageless creature who has mental states that are naturally meaningful in the way described above hits upon the idea of communicating such contents to their fellows in a special way. The

On this story, the driving force behind the emergence of speaker meanings (both primitive and more complex) is the 'pressing need to understand the environment'. Gricean communicative intentions, so crucial in our 'genetic' story for the generation of nonnatural (speaker) meanings, have seemed to disappear. Without the idea that nonnatural meaning is introduced into the natural scene through speakers' special communicative intentions (and their decipherment by hearers) we still do not have a fully Gricean story about meaning. The story requires that a speaker be in a position to utter something with an intention having (roughly) the following content: that the audience (say) come to be informed that p by recognizing the very intention with which U was uttered. It is this idea that is primarily threatened by the circularity problem. The content-functionalist suggestion presented above promises us that there could be primitive enough 'p's that could be entertained by creatures without a language, who do not even have a nonnatural mental representation system (creatures lacking a Fodorian language of thought). But the relevant question for the 'genetic' Gricean is whether the kind of complex Gricean intention just cited could plausibly be counted among the crudely discriminated contents (the primitive 'p's) available to languageless creatures.

The Gricean account of meaning, I believe, is at its best when taken to be an attempt to answer the question: What is the place of linguistic meaning in the natural order - how could it come about? And the 'genetic' story we have told allows the Gricean to answer this question without being encumbered by implausible reductive commitments. Since the
question seems to constitute one central preoccupation of semantic naturalists, one might have expected the Gricean ‘genetic’ story to be of considerable help to the naturalist. But the naturalist who wishes to adopt the story must face the so-called ‘circularity problem’.

Our discussion of the circularity problem has allowed us to identify more precisely and narrowly the main problem for the semantic naturalist who wishes to adopt all the crucial Gricean ideas. To avoid the problem, such a naturalist must offer a non-semantic account of the Gricean intentions that are needed to get our original non-semantic theory into a ‘genetic’ story. If this can be done, other objections to the Gricean account can be handled by recognizing, as the ‘genetic’ reading does, that speakers could kick away the Gricean ladder completely, once they have climbed it to reach a natural language. A naturalist (such as Fodor) who believes that content-functionalist is not up to this task, may still appropriate part of the Gricean story, the part which tells us how we could get from speaker meaning to public linguistic meaning. Such a naturalist could also benefit from the ‘genetic’ reading of Grice, since it shows how the Gricean can avoid a host of objections that trade on a ‘synchronic’ understanding of Grice’s account of public meaning.

The discussion of the circularity problem, however, has suggested a place where the ‘genetic’ Gricean and the naturalist may part ways. Both seem to concentrate efforts on the question of the genesis of meaning. But while the ‘genetic’ Gricean seems content to place linguistic meaning in the natural order by explaining how it could come about as an indirect result of creatures’ intentional actions, it transpires that the naturalist has an additional agenda: to naturalize intentionality itself. In terms of the ‘genetic’ Gricean story, this means naturalizing Gricean intentions or alternatively the contents of thoughts. And in these tasks, the naturalist is on her own.

NOTES

1 “Meaning” was originally published in 1957. References below are to the article as reprinted in Strawson (1967). Grice’s (1968) and (1969), as well as (1989), develop and modify the ideas in “Meaning”. Other developments of Grice’s ideas can be found in Armstrong (1968) and (1971), Schiffer (1972), (1982) and (1983), Strawson (1964) and (1970), Lewis (1969), Bennett (1975), Loar (1981), and Devitt (1981).

2 See Fodor (1975: 103f) and (1967: 50), where Fodor characterizes his view as Gricean. But see section (4a.) below. Davidson’s “Communications and Convention” in (1984), his (1986) and his (1990) all express his commitment to the priority claim.

For a surprising acknowledgement of indebtedness to Grice’s work, see Davidson (1990: 311) (which echoes his earlier (1984), esp. p. 277). I say ‘surprising’, because Davidson is on the record for rejecting the possibility of either defining meaning in terms of intentions or ‘verifying the existence of detailed, general and abstract beliefs and intentions, while being unable to tell what a speaker’s words mean’ (1984: 143f.). On closer examination, it seems as though Davidson rejects the possibility of a reductive analysis of meaning in terms of propositional attitudes, while being committed to the priority of speaker meaning over conventional or public meaning. For Davidson, as for Grice, a philosophical account of meaning should concern itself, in the first place, with (regular, or ‘literal’) speaker meaning. (However, unlike Grice, Davidson considers the notion of conventional meaning to be philosophically uninteresting and unsuited for systematic treatment.)

3 See, e.g., Armstrong (1971), Schiffer (1972), Devitt (1981), and Loar (1981). For more references and relevant discussion, see section (3) below.

4 For a recent summary of the major objections, see Avramidis (1989: Ch. 2). In his review of Avramidis, William Lycan cites is passing some of these objections as “probably the main reason why there are so few Griceans nowadays” (1992: 64).

5 The construal I shall develop makes a brief appearance in Strawson (1970) and in Schiffer (1972), and is, I believe, implicit throughout Bennett (1976). But its potential to help meet or bypass objections to Grice is often underestimated or misconstrued in these works, perhaps due to the authors’ lingering attachment to a ‘conceptual analysis’ reading of Grice. In their Introduction to the Philosophy of Language (1987: Ch. 7), Devitt and Sterelny explicitly deny from this latter reading and offer a ‘genetic’ story, though their discussion is too brief to determine whether they remain fully committed to a Gricean understanding of speaker meaning (I shall return to Devitt and Sterelny’s discussion in (4b.); see esp. note 5).

My preferred construal finds recent support in Grice’s own characterization of his program in his posthumously published collection Studies in the Ways of Words (esp. “Meaning Revisited”). It also has the advantage that it has together two seemingly separate aspects of Grice’s work on language: his attempted reduction of semantic meaning to speaker meaning, and his theory of implicatures. See (3b.) below.

Avramidis (1989) takes Grice to be offering a conceptual analysis of meaning (“a statement of conditions necessary and sufficient for the analysisandum concept to apply”, op.cit., p. 13), but one which gives up entirely on ascribing any reductive ambitions to the Gricean account, in that it does not claim any priority to the concepts employed in the analysis. For recent reading, Grice’s analysis merely “tells us that understanding [the relevant] concept is to be gained only by discerning its place in a system of interrelated concepts” (op.cit., p. 21). Such a construal, I submit, risks not meeting some of the standard objections to Grice’s account, while at the same time losing the naturalist’s interest in it.

This is in sympathy with the idea 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” (1967: 42).

7 Following Grice, “utterance” is here used broadly, to include gestures, non-linguistic sound-making and other potentially meaningful acts. We are also preserving the ‘convenient act-of-ambiguity’ of “utterance” pointed out by Grice (1967: 41) between the act of uttering and its product.

In contemporary, Fodorian jargon, we might say that the displaying of the head (or the showing of the photo, or opening the window) do not have the ‘robustness’ required for meaningfulness. A symbolic representation has robustness insofar as it exhibits a certain detachability from its content: it can maintain its representational content in the face of an unlimited variation in causes. (See Fodor (1987: Ch. 4).) Signs with what Grice calls “natural meaning”, such as smoke, clouds, closing petals, are not robust in this way. Bennett’s distinction (following Armstrong) between ‘intention-independent’ and ‘intention-dependent’ evidence (1976: 16f.) is also relevant here.

8 I submit that some of the alleged counter-examples to Grice’s “Meaning” analysis, such as Searle’s famous American Soldier example (see below, note 41), and Ziff’s madman example (1967: 51) should seem a lot less compelling when this non-idleness requirement is taken into account.

9 For a relevant discussion of the status of Gricean intentions, see my (1992: Sec. 5).
"For group G, utterance-type x means 'p' =m At least some (many) members of G have in their repertoires the procedure of uttering a token of x if, for some A, they intend A to think that p; the retention of this procedure being for them conditional on the assumption that at least some (other) members of G have, or have had, this procedure in their repertoire. (1968: 62) For a concise summary of the Gricean account of timeless and structured meaning, see Avramides (1989: Ch. 2, sections 4 & 5).

1 i.e., the speaker uttering x has the intentions required by the Gricean analysis of speaker meaning.

Along lines suggested by e.g. Grice (1968: 63ff.), Schiffer (1972), Bennett (1976: Ch. 8), and Loar (1981).

1 In this section, I will be presupposing some familiarity with the literature on Grice. For a good recent summary, the reader is referred to Avramides (1989: Ch. 2).

1 The term "Intention-Based Semantics" is due to Schiffer (1982). I have here used the characterization of the program he offers in (1985). It should be noted that, while Schiffer's Meaning (1972) represents an attempt to defend and develop the Gricean program, Schiffer no longer subscribes to the program (as indicated in (1988); see also his Remarks of Meaning (1987)).

1 Avramides's 'reciprocal analysis' reading in her (1989), which she contrasts with the common, 'reductive analysis' understanding of Grice, still fits this description. (See note 5 above.)

1 See e.g. Schiffer (1972: 125), Strawson (1980: 284ff). Armstrong (1971: 43ff.) addresses the problem by denying that the analysis must be understood as requiring psychological reality.

1 See (1984: Ch. 4, sections 1 & 2). I should point out that Blackburn's discussion has been one source of inspiration for articulating the construal proposed below. Millikan (1984: Ch. 3) also discusses the psychological reality problem from a naturalist perspective, and her discussion has several points of contact with Blackburn's.

1 "If a way of inducing belief becomes fixed in a community, that might be enough for it to be said to mean that p, even without considering the complex intentions which would be needed to communicate that p, were the regular habit not already extant" (ibid.)

1 Bennett has proposed to pursue a strategy which offers the Gricean conditions as merely sufficient conditions for meaning (1976: 22). The present point about sufficiency would go against that proposal as well. (For a brief but relevant criticism of Bennett for "being content with sufficiency alone", see Avramides (1989: 67)). Later in his book (1976: sections 50-3), Bennett proposes a weakening of the Gricean conditions themselves, which is inspired by considerations not unlike Blackburn's.

1 The two readings with which the 'genetic' reading is intended to be contrasted can be described as two kinds of reduction: logical reduction (replacing statements involving the notion of meaning with logically equivalent ones involving only speakers' intentions) and empirical reduction (specifying the worldly truth conditions of statements involving the notion of meaning in terms of the presence of the relevant speakers' intentions). As I hope will become clear, the 'genetic' reading can hold even if one denies the possibility of either kind of reduction (although, of course, the possibility of either reduction is not ruled out by the 'genetic' story itself). And this allows it to escape some of the objections which plague the stronger readings.

1 A prominent approach to meaning which seems in opposition to Grice's - one that is found in Quine and Davidson (and to a certain extent Bennett, too) - is based on what can be figured out about the semantic properties of expressions in a finitized state of radical ignorance concerning the language to which the expressions belong. On this approach, the question of genesis - How could the expressions of any language come to have their semantic properties in the first place? - would appear to be altogether bypassed, despite its appearing to be conceptually prior. It is, however, possible to read these philosophers as simply being skeptical about the legitimacy or philosophical interest of the genetic question.
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For a brief discussion, see Blackburn (1984: 151ff).

For the 'autonomy of meaning' see, e.g., Avramides (1989: 74) and Blackburn (1984: 128ff).

Similar remarks can be made with respect to the social determination of meaning and the phenomena of 'linguistic division of labor' pointed out by, e.g., Putnam (1975: Essay 12). See Devitt and Sterelny (1987: sec. 7.5).

For support, see, e.g., Schiffer (1982: 126ff.) and Loar (1981: 33ff.). Avramides believes the main interest of Grice's work does not lie in its ability to offer a viable reductive account of meaning (1989: 78). Accordingly, she offers a reading of Grice which attempts to purify it of all reductive ambitions – her so-called 'reciprocal analysis'. However, I do not believe Avramides' reading can secure the naturalist's interest in Grice's program.

Indeed, so compelling is the argument that even avowed anti-reductionists struggle to find a way to embrace it. For a recent – puzzling – attempt see Avramides (1989: esp. Ch. 5: 3 & 4).

See e.g., Quine (1969: Ch. VI), Davidson (e.g. 1984: Essay 7). Obviously, I cannot even begin to do justice here to the complexity of the issues involved in the analysis of propositional attitudes. In what follows, I shall have to assume some familiarity with the issues, and briefly discuss those aspects that are directly relevant to our present concerns.

See note 8 above. For Fodor, robustness is the mark of genuine representations.

For recent discussions of what is involved in Fodor's naturalizing of semantics, the reader is referred to essays nos. 2, 4, and especially 1 and 3 (as well as to Fodor's replies in Loewer and Rey (1991)).

It is worth emphasizing again that such contents would be very crudely discriminated. This is inevitable, since at this stage we are supposing them to have no semantic structure. Fine discrimination, on this view, comes later, after we have nonnatural meaning. Fodor's discussion of the 'disjunction problem' (see his 1987: Ch. 4) is relevant here.

It may well be that Devitt and Sterelny can find a way of incorporating into the 'drive to control and manipulate the environment' the relevant other-directed Gricean communicative intention in note 5, their discussion is too brief to determine the matter. As it stands, their story, like ours, does accord primacy to speaker meaning over conventional meaning; but it may trade on abandoning the Gricean account of nonnatural speaker meaning. In their earlier discussion of the Gricean account of speaker meaning (1987: section 7.4), they clearly reject a 'conceptual analysis' reading of it, but they shy away from accepting the key idea that the nature of nonnatural speaker meaning (which distinguishes it from natural meaning) is to be explained in terms of the presence of communicative Gricean intentions.

It is interesting to note that this problem is not usually presented as a problem of genesis. Naturalists take the task of naturalizing intentionality to be the task of explaining in some preferred ('natural') terms what it is for a mental state to be intentional, and not the task of telling a plausible story about how mental states come to possess intentionality.

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REFERENCES

Comparatives and the Reducibility of Relations

BY

I.L. HUMBERSTONE

I. Van Bentham's Treatment of Comparatives

In van Bentham 1982 (and, more briefly in 1983, pp. 11-13, 115-118), van Bentham draws attention to what he calls certain 'strong stable convictions' as to how the binary relations expressed by comparative adjectives should behave, namely conditions of transitivity, irreflexivity, and—as van Bentham calls (1.3) here—'almost-connectedness':

\[ \forall x \forall y \forall z ((Rxy \land Ryz) \rightarrow Rxz) \]  
\[ (1.1) \]

\[ \forall x(\neg Rxz) \]  
\[ (1.2) \]

\[ \forall x \forall y \forall z (Rxy \rightarrow (Rxz \lor Ryz)) \]  
\[ (1.3) \]

The condition (1.3) is less familiar than the others, though it occasionally appears in the literature on preference and social choice. Notice that it is satisfied by a relation (on some underlying set \( U \)) just in case the complementary relation (relative to \( U \)) is transitive; for this reason relations satisfying (1.3) have been called 'negatively transitive' (e.g. in Fishburn 1987 and Roberts 1979). We shall retain van Bentham's terminology here, however. Likewise for his axiomatization in terms of (1.1)-(1.3), since these particular conditions will come up individually in our discussion in Sections II and III below. A more economical basis could be obtained by keeping (1.3) while replacing (1.1) and (1.2) by the condition that \( R \) is asymmetric. As Fishburn remarks (1987, p. 8), any asymmetric relation satisfying (1.3) is transitive, and of course any asymmetric relation is irreflexive (and \( \text{vice versa} \)) if the relation is transitive.