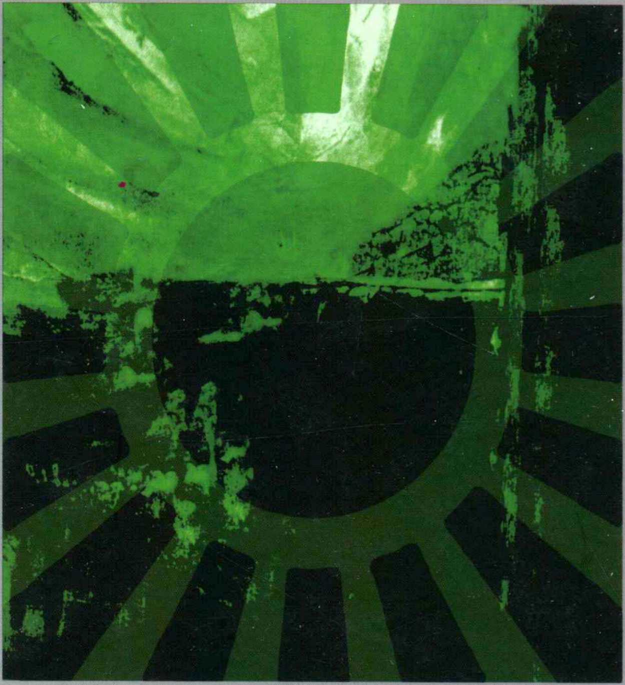
Edited by
Klaus Petrus



Meaning and Analysis

New Essays on Grice

Palgrave Studies in Pragmatics, Language and Cognition

Meaning and Analysis

New Essays on Grice

Edited by

Klaus Petrus
University of Bern, Switzerland

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1

Introduction: Paul Grice, Philosopher of Language, But More Than That*

Klaus Petrus

> I shall first proclaim it as my belief that doing philosophy ought to be *fun*.
>
> (Grice 1986: 61)

1. From metaphysics to the philosophy of language

The British philosopher H. Paul Grice (1913–1988) is regarded as an eminent representative of *Ordinary Language Philosophy* and is well-known for his works in the philosophy of language. With only two papers – 'Meaning' (1957) and 'Logic and conversation' (1967) – he made it into every serious textbook dealing with the philosophy of language, linguistics, communication, or cognitive sciences.

Grice, however, was not only a philosopher of language. At least he would have felt exceedingly uncomfortable, if at the department of the University of California–Berkeley he had been introduced to a visitor as 'Mr Grice, our man in Philosophy of Language' (Grice 1986: 64). Grice did not attach a lot of importance to the division of philosophy into separate faculties. Philosophy, as he states in his 'Reply to Richards', published in the unofficial festschrift *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality. Intention, Categories, Ends*, 'is one subject, a single discipline. [...] Or, one might even dare to say, there is only one problem in philosophy, namely all of them' (Grice 1986: 64). This does not rule out that philosophy has a main subject which connects all putative sub-disciplines with one another. Quite the reverse: 'It might be held that the *ultimate* subject of all philosophy is ourselves, or at least our rational nature' (ibid.: 65; his emphasis).

Indeed, rationality is the topic which figures as a kind of leitmotif throughout Grice's philosophy. He was deeply convinced that human beings – or more precisely, persons – are essentially rational beings (Grice 1991: 140ff.).

Thus Grice looked again and again at different aspects of human behaviour at the individual stages of his work, no matter whether these aspects were of a linguistic or other kind. His special interest was directed at the mental processes underlying human behaviour and making it explicable as rational behaviour at all (Truniger 2006).

Grice was aware of the fact that this approach presumes a comparatively rich ontology. It was a central part of his late philosophy to show that not only psychological concepts like *intention*, but also concepts like *final cause, essential property* and especially *absolute value* are indispensable to any adequate theory of human rationality (Grice 1986, 1991, 2001). Hence in his paper 'Meaning revisited', published in 1982, Grice wrote that 'the notion of value is absolutely crucial to the idea of rationality, or of a rational being' (Grice 1989: 298). Also in his 'Reply to Richards' he stated: 'I believe (or would like to believe) that it is a necessary feature of rational beings, either as part or as a consequence of part of, their essential nature, that they have a capacity for the attribution of value' (Grice 1986: 72).

As far as the ontological inventory is concerned, Grice committed himself frankly to a 'new ontological Marxism' (Grice 1991: 131). In more concrete terms, he followed the principle of *metaphysical constructivism* according to which concepts or entities of any kind can be postulated within a theory as long as they possess explanatory force (Grice 1986: 68ff., 89f.). Hence it was very important to Grice to concern himself with the *methodological* requirements of theory construction, and to account for the introduction of certain concepts or entities at the different stages of theory development.

This project of theory construction, which Grice called 'Theory-theory' (ibid.: 87), seemed to him to be an integral part of any serious science. All the same, within those areas dealing with human rationality, Grice had a certain hierarchy of theories in mind (see Chapman 2005: 173f.). *Metaphysics* takes the position of some 'first philosophy' insofar as it is fundamentally devoted to the question of which *materials* (categories, substances, subjects, attributes etc.) need to be presumed by every theory (Grice 1986: 86ff., 1991: 23–91). Within metaphysics, every further branch has its own Theory-theory. One of these branches is *philosophical psychology,* which is concerned with the nature and function of psychological concepts, and marks out the range of psychological beings (Grice 1991: 121–61). A special case of philosophical psychology is *rational psychology,* which in turn deals with the essence of rational beings as well as with the question of how their behaviour is to be rationally explained (Grice 2001). Finally Grice mentions a sub-branch of rational psychology, which deals with a special form of rational behaviour, viz. linguistic behaviour: the *philosophy of language* (see section 8, figure 1.3).

2. Grice's conception of the philosophy of language

This hierarchical structure of disciplines is interesting in various respects. In particular, it becomes clear that the philosophy of language is not a preferred domain. Yet it is not just a discipline among others either. Rather it is part of a comprehensive *theory of rationality* within the bounds of which the concept of value is obviously of paramount importance.

It is only in his later writings that Grice laid particular stress on this very connection (Grice 1989: 297f., 369, 1991). In his 'Reply to Richards', for instance, he writes in full accord with the above exposition that 'the problems which emerge about meaning are plainly problems in psychology and metaphysics, and I hope that as we proceed it will become increasingly clear that these problems in turn are inextricably bound up with the notion of value' (Grice 1986: 73).

There are, of course, many earlier hints suggesting that Grice considered his investigation into the philosophy of language as contributions to a general account of rationality. This becomes particularly obvious with respect to his famous Cooperative Principle which he puts forward within the framework of his theory of conversation presented in 'Logic and conversation'. There is good reason to believe that the participants' cooperative behaviour can only be explained assuming that we are dealing with essentially rational beings (Baker 1989; Grandy 1989; Petrus 1996; Sbisa 2001). Consequently, it has even been suggested that the Cooperative Principle be replaced by a more basic principle of rationality (Kasher 1976).

Yet it is perfectly possible to interpret Grice's theory of speaker's meaning straight out as an analysis of rational communication (Meggle 1981; Kemmerling 1979, 1986; Petrus 1999), which is, moreover, tightly connected with his considerations about folk-psychological explanations (Grice 2001; see Grandy and Warner 1986: 15ff.). I shall return to these two points in more detail below (sections 5.3 and 6.2).

Grice's idea of a hierarchically structured edifice of sciences is informative in yet another respect: like metaphysics or philosophical psychology, the philosophy of language has its own Theory-theory. Those who concern themselves with it are, in other words, not only dealing with genuinely semantic facts but also with the question of how they approach these facts, how they construct their theories, and for what reason they postulate certain concepts or entities within these theories.

Grice has himself pursued this kind of *Theory-theory of language* (as one could call it) from the very beginning. In his 1957 paper 'Meaning' he tries to show that the concept of intention is the basic notion of any adequate theory of meaning (see below, section 6.2). But in the same breath, he clearly states the following: 'I must disclaim any intention of peopling all our talking life with armies of complicating psychological occurrences' (Grice 1989: 221). As mentioned before, Grice maintains that concepts should only be built into a, say, theory of meaning if they really possess explanatory force. The proof that it is so is part of the construction of this very theory. Concepts which do not have any explanatory value are superfluous from a theoretical point of view, and should therefore not be used. Grice followed this principle without exception. In his 1978 paper 'Further notes on logic and conversation' he refers to it as *Modified Occam's Razor,* which he defines as follows: 'senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity' (Grice 1989: 47).

Grice's remarks on the method of *ordinary language philosophy* (OLP) are relevant in this connection too. Without doubt, throughout his lifetime Grice stuck to the central thesis of this philosophical direction, and defended it several times against more or less mischievous distortions: conceptual analysis of ordinary expressions is definitely an indispensable and integral part of (philosophical) theory construction (Grice 1986: 57ff., 1989: 172ff.). Another thing, however, he was certain about as well: 'to practice conceptual analysis is not necessarily to practice philosophy' (Grice 1989: 174). Although he considered *linguistic botanizing* as practised by John L. Austin and others at Oxford both necessary and useful, he was nevertheless in doubt as to the universal explanatory force of this method (Grice 1986: 57). Often enough it is attributed to OLP that it – unlike *ideal language philosophy* – conceives of systematic theories as being impossible. Perhaps this is merely a cliché. Should it be correct though, Grice would certainly not be a typical representative of this school (Soames 2003: 216; Atlas 2005: 45). He was not content with informal, case-by-case investigations, but doubtless thought of himself as a constructor of theories possessing as much explanatory force as possible – be this a theory of value, a theory of perception, or a theory of meaning.

3. Meaning and use

That Grice always considered the philosophy of language to be a *methodological* project as well becomes perfectly visible as soon as it comes to his attitude towards a further slogan (or cliché) of OLP: 'Meaning is use'. According to Grice, this slogan stands for a procedure which always follows more or less the same pattern (Grice 1989: 4ff.). Let us assume that we are interested in certain concepts such as 'good' or 'true'. Those who are committed to OLP will search for ordinary language sentences in which these words occur. In doing so they will find out that the *normal* use of these sentences implies that a certain condition C is fulfilled. One will, for instance, only say that Pearl Jam is a good grunge band if one is commending it (= condition C); or one will say that it is true that Ferdinand is a dangerous bull only if one knows that it is so, or if one has enough evidence to say so (= condition C). The fact that the standard or appropriate *use* of sentences like these presumes that a condition C is fulfilled is then taken as evidence that the fulfilment of C is a part of the *meaning* of those sentences containing the words in question.

This procedure was very popular with the people in Grice's academic surroundings. A case in point is Peter Strawson, who tried to show in his 1950 paper 'On referring' that Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions does not do justice to the way speakers ordinarily use sentences containing descriptive

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phrases to make statements (Strawson 1950). According to Russell, the proposition expressed by sentences of the form (1) has one of the standard truth values and can be completely characterized using quantifier-variable notation like (2) (Russell 1906):

(1) The present King of France is bald.
(2) $\exists x(Fx \,\&\, \forall y\,(Fy \rightarrow x = y) \,\&\, Gx)$

Against this Strawson objects that normally the expression 'the F' (i.e. 'the present King of France') is correctly *used* only if there is an F (= condition C). Therefore this condition is a part of the *meaning* of 'the F'. If it is not fulfilled – if, as Strawson was later to put it, the *presupposition* that there is an F is false – 'the F is G' cannot be used to express a proposition which is either true or false. From this Strawson draws the further conclusion that 'neither Aristotelian nor Russellian rules give the exact logic of any expression of ordinary language; for ordinary language has no exact logic' (Strawson 1950: 344).

In *Introduction to Logical Theory* (1952), Strawson applies the insight that expressions of a natural language do not have an exact semantics which could be captured by the means of classical logic to the analysis of truth-conditional constants such as '&', '$\vee$', or '$\supset$' (see also Strawson 1986). In this case too he denies that these expressions can capture the meanings of the natural language counterparts 'and', 'or', or 'if'. Let us look at the following sentence (3):

(3) Mr X is in the kitchen or in the living room.

Taken as a strict truth-functional operation, (3) is true iff either one or both of the disjuncts are true, and false iff both disjuncts are false. However, in ordinary language, Strawson holds, the word 'or' has another meaning: people who use a sentence like 'p or q' do not do this because they already know that p is true, or because they already know that q is true. Rather, they utter this sentence only if they are not sure which of both is true (= condition C). If this condition is not fulfilled there is, according to Strawson, a misuse of language. In other words: It is a part of the *meaning* of a suchlike sentence that it is *used* correctly only if the speaker does not know that p is true, and does not know that q is true either. Thus it cannot be correct that the meaning of the word 'or' is adequately captured by the formal device '$\vee$' (Strawson 1952: 78ff.).

3.1 Meaning versus use

Grice does not hold the view that this procedure is fundamentally inappropriate or wrong; and he concedes that it sometimes leads to correct results. But at the same time he draws attention to the fact that the *identification* of meaning with use can sometimes be the source of fundamental philosophical errors (Grice 1989: 4ff.), since by doing so one runs the risk of overlooking central differences between concepts like *saying, meaning* and *use*, or of confusing formal or semantic with pragmatic components of language (Grice 1986: 59).

It is important to note that Grice's criticism of the slogan 'Meaning is use' is first of all *methodologically* motivated. Grice emphasizes several times that it is the task of conceptual analysis to determine the actual meaning of an expression. Hence it is decisive to clearly distinguish between the actual meaning and other, additional aspects of the use of an expression. In order to do so Grice has first of all to show that there exists something like the actual meaning at all. The 1956 paper 'In defense of a dogma', written with Strawson, was to serve exactly this purpose (Grice 1989: 196–212). Had Quine been right with his objections against the analytic/synthetic distinction (Quine 1953), the concept of meaning would turn out to be a myth indeed, and conceptual analysis in Gricean style would be impossible.

In a next step, Grice needs to explain what the difference between the meaning and further aspects of the use of an expression is. A first approach is made in 'The causal theory of perception' dating back to the year 1961. Even though this paper is not dealing with issues of the philosophy of language in the narrow sense of the word, there is a section titled 'Implication', which contains an answer to Strawson's analysis of the relation between truth-conditional constants and their ordinary language counterparts (Grice 1961: 131ff.; unfortunately, this section has been left out in the *Studies*).

Grice too concedes that uttering a disjunctive statement 'p or q' normally (as he still used to say at that point) *implies* that the speaker does not know that p, and that she does not know that q either (= condition C). Nevertheless he denies that the correctness of this implication constitutes a condition for the truth or falsity of the disjunctive statement. Neither is it a part of the meaning of 'p or q', or something which is implied by this very sentence (or by the statement made). What is implied, in other words, is no Strawsonian presupposition (Grice 1989: 269ff.). This is so because it holds for presuppositions that β is a presupposition of α, just in the case the truth or falsity of α requires the truth of β. To state it more exactly, α loses its truth-value if β is false. Against that Grice maintains that the disjunctive statement 'p or q', or the proposition expressed by it, does not cease to be true or false if the implication proves to be wrong. Hence what is implied does not contribute anything to the truth conditions of the utterance. It is not part of what was said by it, but owes itself to the use the speakers make of the sentence in question – and this is actually based on a meaning which has been captured by classical logic. As far as this use beyond meaning or – more exactly – beyond what is said is concerned, Grice comments:

> [T]he fact that the utterance of the disjunctive sentence normally involves the implication of the speaker's ignorance of the truth-values of the

> disjuncts is, I should like to say, to be explained by reference to a general principle governing the use of language. Exactly what this principle is I am uncertain, but a *first shot* would be the following: 'One should not make a weaker statement rather than a stronger one unless there is a good reason for so doing'. (Grice 1961: 132; his emphasis)

This passage anticipates a lot of what Grice is going to elaborate on in his William James Lectures. Part of it is making this principle or 'pragmatic rule' (as Strawson, with reference to Grice, calls another principle in footnote 1, p. 179 of his *Introduction to Logical Theory*) more precise, as well as erecting a typology of different implications. The first leads to Grice's considerations about the status and the role of the *conversational maxims*, whereas the latter results in the distinction between conventional and conversational *implicatures* (as he will call the above-mentioned implications). Taken together, they both form the central components of Grice's famous *theory of conversation* (see section 5).

Against this background, the theory of conversation turns out to be a *methodological* instrument (and not simply a theory of rational communication; see Lüthi 2006). And thus considered it is part of some Theory-theory as well (see section 2). What matters to Grice is a criticism of the slogan 'Meaning is use' – at least insofar as it amounts to an identification of meaning with use, and thus to a confusion of semantic and pragmatic aspects of language (Grice 1986: 59).

3.2 Meaning as a function of use

All this may suggest that Grice took the view that meaning has nothing to do with use. This, however, is not correct. On the contrary, it is thanks to him that it became obvious that the meaning of an expression is a function of what speakers do with it, or, as Grice explains in his paper 'Meaning' (1957) for the first time, *mean* by this expression on particular occasions of use.

Grice is convinced that it is constitutive of the basic concept that a speaker by doing something under certain circumstances means something in doing so. All other semantic concepts – such as, for instance, word-meaning, sentence-meaning, or what is said – are derivative and should be explicated in terms of the basic concept of speaker's meaning (see figure 1.2 on page 17). Thus considered, Grice's challenge consists in the development of a *theory of language* which neither identifies meaning with use, nor completely divorces the two. The former, if one likes to put it this way, is to be achieved by the *theory of conversation*, the latter by the *theory of meaning*. Like the theory of conversation, Grice's theory of meaning can be regarded from the viewpoint of a methodological enterprise, or as part of some Theory-theory, since in the end, Grice simultaneously pursues the project of conceptual analysis the purpose of which is to determine the actual meaning of an expression. For this purpose, however, a solid and workable theory of meaning is called for (see section 6).

4. Theory of language

In his William James Lectures Grice repeatedly indicates what the purpose of a *theory of language* should consist in. What it comes down to is the determination of the total signification of an utterance (while 'utterance' is to be understood in a very general sense in the context of Grice's writings). In his 1968 paper 'Utterer's meaning, sentence-meaning, and word-meaning' he proposes the following distinctions within the total signification:

> [...] a distinction between what a speaker has *said* (in a certain favored, and maybe in some degree artificial, sense of 'said'), and what he has *implicated* (e.g. implied, indicated, suggested), taking into account the fact that what he has implicated may be either *conventionally* implicated (implicated by virtue of the meaning of some word or phrase which he has used) or *nonconventionally* implicated (in which case the specification of the implicature falls outside the specification of the conventional meaning of the words used). (Grice 1989: 118; first two emphases by Grice)

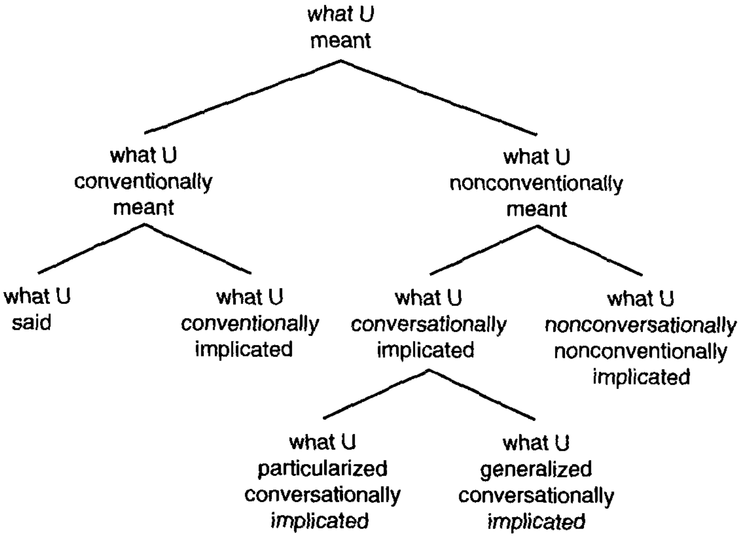
what U meant
what U conventionally meant
what U nonconventionally meant
what U said
what U conventionally implicated
what U conversationally implicated
what U nonconversationally nonconventionally implicated
what U particularized conversationally implicated
what U generalized conversationally implicated

Figure 1.1 Grice's theory of language

As we shall see later on, Grice is especially interested in a particular kind of nonconventional implicatures which he calls *conversational* implicatures, and which he subdivides into *particularized* and *generalized* implicatures (Grice 1989: 40f.). What, moreover, (at least indirectly) follows from passages of 'Further notes on logic and conversation' is that Grice equates the specification of the total signification of an utterance x made with a specification of what the utterer U *means* by uttering x (see Levinson 1983: 131; Neale 1992: 520; but see also Saul 2002). Roughly, this results in the spectrum shown above (figure 1.1), which a theory of language à la Grice should be able to cope with.

5. Conversation and implicatures

Grice is very concerned about stating the notions presented in figure 1.1 more precisely, and explaining how they are interconnected. Without doubt, the concept of *what is said* plays a central role in this respect. On the one hand Grice seems to take the view that what is said by an utterance is a variety of what is *meant*, or that what is said can be explicated in terms of what is meant (see figure 1.2). The concept of what is said is therefore an integral part of Grice's *theory of meaning*. On the other hand it is of eminent importance to *the theory of conversation* and the characterization of implicatures, insofar as implicatures are usually thus characterized, that U says something and means (implicates) something over and above that. In other words, the concept of what is said constitutes the interface between Grice's theory of conversation and his theory of meaning (see section 6.1).

5.1 Conventional implicatures

What U said by an utterance can, according to Grice, be understood 'to be closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) he has uttered' (Grice 1989: 25). As Gottlob Frege already wrote in his paper 'Der Gedanke' (Frege 1918/19), Grice too notices that the conventional meaning of an uttered sentence does from time to time both fall short and go beyond what is said (Neale 2001; Horn 2007). The first holds if the sentence contains, for instance, indexical and/or ambiguous expressions (e.g. 'He is in the grip of a vice'). For an identification of what is said one needs to fix the referents of these expressions, and to eliminate ambiguities. The latter holds if the uttered sentence contains conventional devices which signal that U – as Grice puts it – over and above some central speech act performed a further, non-central speech act (Grice 1989: 122). A first example is already given in Grice's paper 'The causal theory of perception'. If U utters the sentence:

(4) Sally is poor **but** she is honest.

she strictly speaking performs two speech acts: (i) U *says* that Sally is poor and that she is honest; (ii) additionally, U *indicates* that there is a contrast between poverty and honesty (or that somebody – perhaps U herself – thinks that this is so).

According to Grice, it is decisive that the conventional device 'but' in (4) plays a part in figuring out what U meant, or – as Grice puts it – *conventionally implicated*. This very expression, however, plays no part in determining what U said by (4). In other words, *the same* is said in (4) and (5):

(5) Sally is poor **and** she is honest.

The reason for this is that the conventional implicature generated by 'but' (i.e. (ii)) contributes in no way to the *truth conditions* of the utterance (Grice 1961: 127; but see Bach 1999). This becomes immediately obvious since the conventional implicatum can be false without what is said being false (as regards the difference between implicatures and presuppositions see section 3).

Grice terms these implicatures 'conventional' because they result from the conventional meaning of words like 'but' or 'therefore'. In order to see that by (4) it is meant that there is a contrast between (Sally's) poverty and honesty nothing more than knowledge of the linguistic conventions which rule the use of 'but' is needed.

5.2 Nonconventional implicatures

It is in this respect that all the other forms of implicatures, which could accordingly be termed 'nonconventional', differ from the conventional ones (see figure 1.1). Grasping them requires of the audience some extra-linguistic considerations which provide the key for working out or calculating the implicature in question (Grice 1989: 31, 39).

As regards *conversational implicatures* the assumption is, roughly speaking, that U cooperates or wants to make a meaningful contribution to the conversation by her utterance. This in turn requires that, for instance, the utterer U and the addressee A know which purpose their conversation serves (and know this of each other as well; but see Gu 1994). That U is cooperative means that she observes the following principle (and that each of the participants supposes that this is the case and that they know this of each other): 'Make your conversational contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.' (Grice 1989: 26) To this *Cooperative Principle* (CP) Grice subordinates four categories of maxims and sub-maxims. *Maxims of Quantity*: (1) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange); (2) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. *Maxims of Quality*: Try to make your contribution one that is true; (1) Do not say what you believe to be false; (2) Do

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