

In the Tradition of Kantotle: review of Grice Festschrift

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Richard E. Grandy and Richard Warner (eds), *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality: Intentions, Categories, Ends*, Clarendon Press, 1986.

This is a Festschrift for H. P. Grice; born in 1913, he taught at St John's College, Oxford, until he went to the University of California at Berkeley about twenty years ago. Not well known outside the philosophical fraternity, Paul Grice is influential and admired within it. Some of his thirty or so unpublished articles and book-length manuscripts have got loose and helped to spread his ideas, but his influence has radiated out mainly from seminars and lectures, and from his publications. Since Grice's viva voce performances do not usually aim to entertain, and since his publications comprise only fourteen papers—one in 1941, a second in 1956, then a bit faster but bringing the average only up to six pages a year over forty-five years—this is a remarkable achievement.

One of its causes is sheer quality: of English-language philosophers now over sixty years old only Quine, Strawson and Davidson contribute as significantly. Some of Grice's influence comes from his collaborations: he really collaborates, working with someone for weeks and months on a philosophical project, in a manner possibly unique for a philosopher of such stature. And he is without peer as an example of how to do philosophy directly, simply and without

idiosyncrasy. The special flavours of Quine and Strawson and our other leading philosophers are valuable, but they should not be copied. Grice is the only leader of whom it is true that the level of the discipline would be raised if most philosophers took him as a model of how to think and write.

Philosophical Grounds of Rationality opens with a forty-page overview by the editors, Richard Grandy and Richard Warner of (some of) Grice's Work, to which he responds at length, offering also a thirty-page section entitled 'Life and Opinions of Paul Grice'. Then, starting at p. 109, there are nineteen contributed papers, of which about half directly address Grice's work, or (in two cases) grow out of collaborations with him. Finally, his publications and 'Unpublications' are listed.

Grice deserves a less slack job of editing. The book seems to have been many years in the making, but we are not told what is old and what new; there is no preface. The title and subtitle do not contain Grice's name (though they yield it as an acronym); the editors make a nonsense of something they quote from him by omitting its crucial phrase (on p. 21; on p. 30 they quote it again, intact this time); there is a howler on p. 16, where the editors take it for granted that 'If a person desires p, and believes if p then q, then—other things being equal—the person will desire q'; the bibliographies of the contributed papers are not conflated, and there are stylistic

discrepancies among and even within them; unexplained, abbreviations are used; the list of Grice's publications omits his 'Intention and Uncertainty' (1971), which is discussed in one of the papers; work of his that is distributed through three publications is said by one contributor to have had 'unfortunately [its] only printed statement' in 1975, and by another to be 'unfortunately unpublished'. The list of 'Unpublications' is not informative enough about lengths; and it omits 'Some Reflections about Ends and Happiness', which is discussed by Warner in his own contributed paper. The index is only of names, not topics; it contains rubbish, including the names of irrelevant royalty and of Grandy's dog; 'René' and 'Esheté' have no accent, but 'Hector' has one and 'Amélie' gets two; 'Castañeda' is misspelled (it is misspelled differently on p. 335); the 'Grice' entry is absurd—an unstructured list of seventy-seven page references. The book's design and other features are not worthy of the Clarendon Press: for example, someone should have vetoed the typography on p. 175; the handling of footnotes is erratic—compare pp. 271 and 364 with p. 420; and my copy is clumsily bound.

Still, it is good to have this volume, and especially good to have Grice's 'Life and Opinions'. In these pages, Grice recounts his experiences in a group of 'the younger Oxford philosophers [who met] under the leadership of Austin, and reports on J. L. Austin's 'high respect' for G. E. Moore—Austin said 'Some like Wittgenstein, but Moore's *my* man.' That a single philosopher could admire Moore and be admired by Grice is worth considering.

What Austin valued in Moore was what he saw as an unusual level of care over details, but where he saw care many of us see random quibbling that is not controlled by an internalized sense of what the issues and options are. Issues were not vividly real to Moore, because he was moved more by scornful surprise at what philosophers say than

by wonder at the human condition or the given world or his own thoughts. And most options were unavailable to him, because he was so woodenly unable to criticise the terms in which he had inherited a problem.

Austin had little taste for large issues. He said 'Importance isn't important; truth is', and he moved towards seeing his kind of linguistic inquiry as an end in itself rather than as a means to philosophical understanding. That led him to overvalue Moore's kind of 'care'.

He had something that Moore lacked, namely 'mastery in seeking out, and sensitivity in responding to, the finer points of linguistic usage'—the phrase is Grice's, and Austin's writings and the memories of many of us can testify that it fits. Grice calls the exercise of those skills 'linguistic botanizing', which he says is 'indispensable at a certain stage in a philosophic inquiry', calling it 'lamentable that this lesson has been forgotten, or has never been learned'.

Thus, Austin's most notable skill is seen by Grice as something to be included in one's 'professional armoury' and used 'at a certain stage' in laying 'an indispensable foundation'. What puts a world of difference between the two is Grice's desire to augment his armoury and do battle with important philosophical problems.

Just how philosophy relates to linguistic botanizing, and how to decide which of them one is doing, are hard questions of which I have seen no finer short treatment than Grice's clear and modest discussion on pp. 58–61. All his work has the same purity: nothing in its form or content swaggers, postures, or otherwise calls attention to its author; puts a decorative covering over a difficulty in the position being taken; or seeks advantage from deriding rival views. Grice's willingness to write in plain, exposed prose is what, above all, makes him exemplary. To come to have *those* virtues of his we need only courage and patience.

More than most philosophers of his rank, Grice attends to the great philosophers of the past, though not, he adds in a phrase calculated, to offend, to 'relatively minor' figures like Wollaston, Bosanquet and Wittgenstein. His account (pp. 64–6) of how and why 'we should treat those who are great but dead as if they were great and living, as persons who have something to say to us *now*' is sane and inspiring. His view of the unity of philosophy down the years is supported by a thesis about the unity of philosophy considered atemporally, the thesis—perhaps—that 'there is only one problem in philosophy, namely all of them'. Grice admits, with 'embarrassment', that 'I do not know exactly what the thesis is which I want to maintain', and proceeds to examine possible candidates. His embarrassed uncertainty is fruitful.

The editors want 'to exhibit the connections among Grice's various projects', because 'the systematic nature of his work is little recognized'. They have some success in this, though they do not get far with exhibiting the unity of Grice's method or, more generally, with getting across the flavour of his work.

The work is always a project of rational reconstruction: challenged by some puzzling aspect of our conceptual scheme, Grice tries to build it out of elementary materials, aiming to understand and also to justify it. The strand of justification—of showing the item in question to be rational—is echoed in the Festschrift's title, and explains why Grice attends so much to the philosopher he calls 'Kantotle'. His profound 'Method in Philosophical Psychology (From the Banal to the Bizarre)', should be learned by heart by all contemporary philosophers of mind, gets a wealth of ideas about mentality out of the project of pretending to be God and considering how to go about constructing rational beings.

Grice's scope has increased through the years, yet he keeps returning to many of the same themes, criticising, refining, deepening and broadening his previous work on

them. The moral seems to be: Understand this small thing in itself and in relation to its conceptual neighbours, and much will be added unto you. One is reminded of Galileo, remaking the world by passionately trying to understand balls rolling down an inclined plane.

The editors' overview starts with Grice's famous theory (1957) about what it is to mean something by a sound or a gesture. Clearly, there is more to meaning that the tank is full than acting so as to get someone to believe that the tank is full; because you could do that by forcing him to look at the fuel brimming in the tank, and that wouldn't involve meaning, or anyway not the kind of meaning that language has. What Grice added was simple: you do something meaning by it that P if you do it intending to get someone to think that P *and intending to produce this result partly through the person's realizing that that is what you are up to*. (In later versions, 'think that P' is replaced by 'think that the speaker thinks that P'.) Assertions and injunctions are not the whole story, but they are so basic and central that a good theory about them should be the core of a good theory of meaning generally.

It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this discovery of Grice's. Language is so conspicuously unique to *Homo sapiens* that it tends to impede our view of anything else, and yet it is so pervasive and familiar that in a certain way it tends to drop out of sight. We need to be able to see it as a separable but integrated part of the whole human condition, and that can be done if we can get language partly into focus by seeing it as vehicle of meaning, and can demystify meaning by explaining it in terms of beliefs and intentions; if we can fit those into their biological place, so much the better. The hardest problem seemed to be establishing clearly the link between psychology and meaning, and Grice's analysis solves that.

The bit of it that I have reported goes only as far as what a person means on a particular occasion: the person, not the utterance; and a particular occasion, not in general. (Patrick Suppes's paper in this volume defends that starting-point for meaning-theory.) Grice tried in 1968 to get from the person to the utterance by getting from the particular to the general, with help from the notion of 'having a certain procedure in one's repertoire'. This notion, at least in Grice's use of it, involves the idea of being guided by some rule of which one is not aware, and the notion of unconscious guidance is what the editors focus on. (Something like it, incidentally, would be needed in any viable rival to Grice's account—as for example, the one I prefer, which uses the concept of convention to get from what a person means on an occasion to what an expression means in general.)

This leads the editors further into Grice's 'Method in Philosophical Psychology', and especially into its humane reminder that our beliefs about one another's minds are not just explanatory devices. A good theory of the mind, Grice says, must not only show how mentalistic concepts help one to predict and explain behaviour, but must also provide for my being interested in what your mental state is 'because of a concern' for you. This thought kicks off an aggressive counter-attack against those who question whether we should continue trying to understand one another in the humdrum belief-want-hope-fear terms of 'folk psychology'. This argument strikes me as vulnerable, and the 'eliminative materialists' will find plenty to say in reply. The ongoing argument will be instructive.

The point about 'concern' is also the pivot for a modulation into Grice's work in ethics. The editors follow that out a certain distance (first squeezing in three pages on metaphysics); but they have to rely on unpublished work, and eventually on 'a recent conversation' with Grice, and

since I have not had access to these materials I am left with no firm grasp of what is going on.

When Grice replies to the editors on his theory of meaning, he is illuminating on the nature of propositions, about which they had raised questions. He also has a treatment of unconscious guidance by rules, and of the related fact that his theory, as interpreted by himself and others, implies that someone who speaks meaningfully has an infinity of intentions.

That threatening infinity entered the story in response to a challenge to the original theory by Strawson, who presented a case in which I do something **(i)** intending to get you to think that P, and **(ii)** intending this to come about through your realizing that **(i)** is what I'm up to, but *not* **(iii)** intending you to realize that **(ii)** is what I am up to. Grice's original analysis marks off the species 'meaning' from the genus 'trying-to-produce-belief' by requiring, for meaning, a certain kind of openness, a freedom from manipulation; and Strawson argued in effect that the required openness must go all the way up—hence the looming threat of an infinitely high stack of intentions.

Grice's solution involves saying that the latter represents a kind of ideal, and that we may be entitled to 'deem' a speaker to have such a super-rich intentional state if his behaviour indicates that he is close enough to the ideal. But really Strawson overdid the demand for openness in meaning; or so I have argued, and Andreas Kemmerling in his paper in this book contends that I didn't push that point far enough. Anyway, even if meaning did require openness all the way up, it is enough for the speaker not to have a devious intention at any level; he doesn't need an undeviating intention at every level. So we don't need help here from the suspect notion of deeming someone to have intentions that he doesn't have.

In the rest of his ‘Reply’ to the editors, Grice doesn’t really answer them on philosophical psychology, metaphysics and value theory, and indeed they didn’t give him much to answer. Announcing that he will ‘take up, or take off from’ their remarks, he sets off on his own, outlining views of his about what metaphysics is, could be, should be. This sketch glows with Gricean virtue: it is deep, bold and clear, and the difficulties are lit with the same intensity as the solutions.

Grice makes metaphysics collaborate with his philosophy of mind in support of a strong view about the objectivity of value. A crucial element in this line of thought is the unfashionable notion of ‘autonomous finality’—the notion of substances that are ‘essentially “for doing such and such”.’ He doesn’t mean that someone values them for doing such and such, or that we call them so-and-so only because they do such and such, but just, blankly, simply, that they essentially *are* for doing such and such. I doubt that a good metaphysical account of our world would employ any such notion; but that partly reflects doubts about Grice’s views about what constitutes good metaphysics. He writes:

That metaphysical house-room be found for the notion of absolute value is a *rational demand*. To say this is. . . to say that there is good reason for *wanting* it to be true that the notion is acceptable. . . Granted that there is a rational demand for absolute value, one can then perhaps argue that within whatever limits are imposed by metaphysical constructions already made, we are free to rig our metaphysics in such a way as to legitimize the concept of absolute value.

These excerpts may be misleading, but even when the passage is taken as a whole there is an air of libertinism about it that could make it hard to defend.

But this part of Grice’s ‘Reply’, packed as it is with content, is too sketchy to be confidently argued with. We

need more; and I, for one, ache for the appearance of Grice’s book-length unpublications. He speaks of ‘the (one hopes) not too distant time’ when his 1979 Locke Lectures are published, but what about the 1983 Carus Lectures?

The contributed papers include good things by Donald Davidson, Jaakko Hintikka, Gilbert Harman, Alan Code and others. I shall report on three of the others. ‘

John Searle has a rival to Grice’s account of what meaning is—he wants to replace ‘intention to *make the hearer believe*’ by ‘intention to *represent a state of affairs*’. The Gricean openness condition is not needed in analysing meaning, according to Searle, but only in analysing communication, for it is only the latter that must involve a hearer, a beneficiary of openness. What the speaker must intend in communicating, Searle maintains, is that the hearer understand, not necessarily that he believe. Searle’s use of ‘understand’ against Grice seems to me circular: there seems to be no relevant concept of understanding that is not parasitic upon, and thus unavailable for the analysis of, the concept of meaning. Similarly with representation: what is it for a gesture of mine to represent the fact that P, if not for it to play some part in an attempt to tell someone something involving the fact that P? Searle, however, thinks he can explain it otherwise. According to him, a gesture represents the state of affairs that it is going to rain if ‘a criterion of success’ of the gesture is that it is, and not because of the gesture, going to rain. Searle’s notion of ‘success’ seems to him to have explanatory value; I don’t see it.

Strawson expounds and criticizes a view of Grice’s about the meaning of ‘if’. The short of it is this: someone who says ‘If she bet heads, she won’ speaks truly just so long as she either didn’t bet heads or did win (or both). The juicier part of the story is Grice’s explanation of why so many conditionals that are true according to him strike people as

false. Consider ‘If James II didn’t succeed Charles II, then Oliver Cromwell did’. This bizarre conditional, according to Grice, is true in what it actually means, namely that *either James II succeeded Charles II or Oliver Cromwell did*. But our rules for good behaviour in conversation include something like this: ‘If you can say more without using more words, do so’; and that condemns the behaviour of someone who says ‘If James II didn’t, . . .’ etc. if he knows that James II *did*. . . etc. So in normal circumstances a civilized speaker will say ‘If James II didn’t, . . .’ etc. only if he doesn’t know who succeeded Charles II, and thinks there is some chance that Cromwell did; and by asserting the conditional he is conversationally implying that there is some chance that Cromwell succeeded Charles II. So his true conditional strikes us as bizarre because what it conversationally implies is wildly false.

Grice’s theory of conversational implicature, of which this is a fragment, is powerful and widely applauded. It is serviceable for more than just defending the minimalist account of the meaning of ‘if’.

I don’t agree with Grice about ‘if’, but not for Strawson’s reason. Strawson holds that ‘If P, Q’ means something like

‘There is a connection between P and Q which ensures that: it is not the case that P is true and Q false’

whereas Grice holds that it means only what comes after the colon. Now, Strawson argues, whatever is the truth about ‘if’, it seems obvious that there could be a connective that meant what Strawson thinks ‘if’ means, whereas Grice’s line of argument implies that there couldn’t be; so Grice’s position is guilty of overkill, and must be wrong. In fact, Strawson is wrong about what Grice is committed to. Perhaps he has to say that we, with our actual forms of life, couldn’t have a Strawsonian ‘if’; that if we tried to have one, all its surplus meaning would (so to speak) drain off into mere

conversational implication, leaving only ‘Either not-P or Q’ as the conventional meaning. But there could be a society where people often gave disjunctive information—something meaning ‘Either P is false or Q is true’—although they knew which disjunct was true. It might be a society where this happened a lot in games, intelligence tests, initiation rites, teasing, etc. Given a wide enough prevalence of that kind of disjoining, there would be room for a connective whose conventional meaning was that of ‘It is not the case that P is true and Q false, and this is not one of those deliberate withholdings of information’. That would be the Strawsonian ‘if’.

George Myro presents, and develops in formal detail, an idea which he got in conversation from Grice. Is what is in my hand new or old? Well, the coin I am holding was minted last week; the silver in my hand is as old as the hills; but my hand is empty except for a silver coin. This illustrates a general problem, known to Aristotle, about how *things* relate to the *stuff* they are made of. If the silver is the coin, then (it seems) it can’t be true that the silver is old and the coin new. Some say that strictly there is no coin in my hand, only some (old) silver that recently became coin-formed. Others say that there are two coincident objects in my hand, an old mass of silver and a new coin. Another line, that has recently appeared in print a few times—and apparently occurred independently to Grice who impressed Myro with it—is that the silver is *now* (identical with) the coin, but that last month it was not. This introduces the notion of x’s being y at one time and not at another. So the silver is old, because it existed a million years ago. The silver is *now* the coin; but it doesn’t follow that the coin is old; for at the remote times when the silver existed the silver was not the coin. It’s a long, complicated, challenging story; Myro’s development of it is full of pith. I am still thinking about his

'Grice Rule' for quickly evaluating philosophical ideas put forward in conversation by Paul Grice: the rule says that

the idea will be right if, but only if, it initially strikes one as incredible.