

“Toward an account of *S*-Meaning”



Stephen Schiffer

Background

- We learned last class about Grice's intention based semantics
- Schiffer was a contemporary of Grice
- Grice's IBS theory was criticized by other philosophers such as Searle and Strawson
- Schiffer refines Grice's IBS in order to refute these arguments
- He creates the strongest possible Gricean Account only because he wants to be the person to disprove it
- We will be describing the criticisms and Schiffer's responses to them

COUNTER EXAMPLES

Dirty Dunham

- Dan and I are buddies
- We both love philosophy and hate loud people and noisy parties
- He is going abroad next semester and I am his housing proxy
- He is deciding where to live on campus next year and because of its central location Dunham is on the top of his list
- He has never lived there and does not know of its reputation on campus
- I currently live there, and because I am his friend and knows his preferences, I do not want him to live there
- In order to pull this off I plan a scheme to show him how noisy the hall can be



The Scheme



- On the day that Dan comes over to inspect Dunham I plan on throwing a rager
- While Dan is walking towards Dunham I give a couple of kids on the quad beers and tell them that there is a party where everyone is invited inside
- Dan gets to the quad at the same time that I give the bros beer and tell them to go rager
- He doesn't think I know he heard me or saw my actions
- However, I saw him out of the corner of my eye and spoke loudly enough so that he could hear me
- I also know that Dan trusts me completely and I know Dan well enough that his reasoning would be

Dan's Reasoning

- “Nik hates loud annoying parties and he would never invite people to one because that would make it bigger and louder. So, Nik really knows what Dunham is like and this is his best way of showing me that noisy parties occur frequently in Dunham”

SG1

S meant something by (or in) uttering x iff S uttered x intending

- (1) that x have a certain feature(s) f ;
- (2) that a certain audience A recognize (think) that x is f ;
- (3) that A infer at least in part from the fact that x is f that S uttered x intending (4):
- (4) that S 's utterance of x produce a certain response r in A ;
- (5) that A 's recognition of S 's intention (4) shall function as at least part

I want to show Dan that Dunham is unsuitable to live in by throwing a party and inviting lots of kids, intending:

- (1) That parties are loud
- (2) That Dan understands that parties are loud
- (3) That I intend for Dan to recognize Dunham is loud. For this reason, I throw a party and invite a lot of people to go to it; Intending (4):
- (4) That my throwing a party will make Dan not want to live in Dunham
- (5) That Dan's recognition of my intent (4) will be a part of his decision not wanting to live in Dunham

Problem with SG1

- My throwing the party fulfills all of the conditions of SG1
- I intend that my throwing the party will lead Dan to believe Dunham is noisy
- I also intend that Dan infers from my throwing the party that Dunham is noisy
- We want to say that I led Dan to infer that Dunham is noisy
- But we don't want to say that I meant that Dunham is noisy because I threw that party
- Throwing a party is not an act of meaning, so Schiffer suggests we add a sixth condition, (6), to SG1

SG 2

- S meant something by (or in) uttering x iff S uttered x intending
 - (1) that x have a certain feature(s) f ;
 - (2) that a certain audience A recognize (think) that x is f ;
 - (3) that A infer at least in part from the fact that x is f that S uttered x intending (4):
 - (4) that S 's utterance of x produce a certain response r in A ;
 - (5) that A 's recognition of S 's intention (4) shall function as at least part of A 's reason for his response r (Schiffer, *Meaning* 13).
 - (6) that A should recognize S 's intention (3).
- I intend for Dan to know that Dunham is loud but I don't intend for Dan to understand my whole scheme.
- (I know that he knows I'm throwing the party in order to dissuade him from living in Dunham, but he doesn't know that I know that he knows that)
- Therefore, (6) is not satisfied and it rules out this example as a case of meaning

SG2 continued

- Nik and Dan are chillaxing in the Dirty D, when Nik decides its time for Dan to leave.
- Nik decides the best way to accomplish this is to sing atrociously Barry Manelow's timeless classic, "Copacabana"
- Nik intends for Dan to leave the room because of the burning sensation in his ear drums
- Nik also intends for Dan to infer that butchering "Copacabana" means Nik wants Dan to leave the room

SG2 continued

- Dan recognizes Nik's intention that Dan should think he should leave because of the sound
- Dan recognize Nik's intention that Dan should infer from the abominable noise that somewhat resembles "Copacabana", that Nik wants him to leave the room
- Dan doesn't recognize that Nik knows that Dan is aware of both of his intentions

Newest solution: SG3

- (1) Copacabana sounds awful
- (2) Dan recognizes Copacabana is awful
- (3) Dan infers at least in part from the fact that Copacabana is awful that Nik sang it intending
- (4) that the singing would make Dan want to leave
- (5) Dan's recognition of Nik's intention (to make Dan want to leave) is at least part of the reason for Dan wanting to leave
- (6) Dan recognizes Nik's intention to have Dan make the above inference
- (7) Dan must recognize Nik's intention to have Dan recognize Nik's intention (that Nik wants Dan to leave (5))

But...

- Nik wants Dan to leave again, but this time starts singing R. Kelly's "Bump and Grind" horribly
- Now Nik intends that Dan should leave because Nik wants him to
- Nik wants Dan to recognize his intention
- But Nik wants Dan to think that Nik is trying to get Dan to leave because of the bad singing, but also wants Dan to think the real intention is to express that Nik wants Dan to leave
- In reality, the discrepancy between what Nik wants Dan to think, and what Dan thinks Nik wants him to think does not exist, but Nik has made Dan believe such
- Dan thinks he has recognized Nik's intention to have Dan recognize Nik's intention, however Nik's purpose is simpler- he wants Dan to know that Nik wants Dan to leave

So we add...

- (8) Dan must recognize Nik's intention (7) that Dan recognize Nik's intention that Dan's recognition of Nik's intention will cause him to leave the room
- We could continue like this
- But let's not

Searle's Counter example

- An American soldier is captured by the Italians
- He wants to make the Italians think he is a German soldier by saying the only phrase he knows in German
- The phrase he says does not translate to “I am a German officer” but he intends that the Italians think that he is a German Soldier
- Searle believes this is a counter example because the American knows that the words he is saying do not mean that he is a German soldier but the act of speaking them would necessarily mean he is
- There is a disconnect between the meaning of the words he is speaking and the message he is trying to communicate to the Italians by saying those words

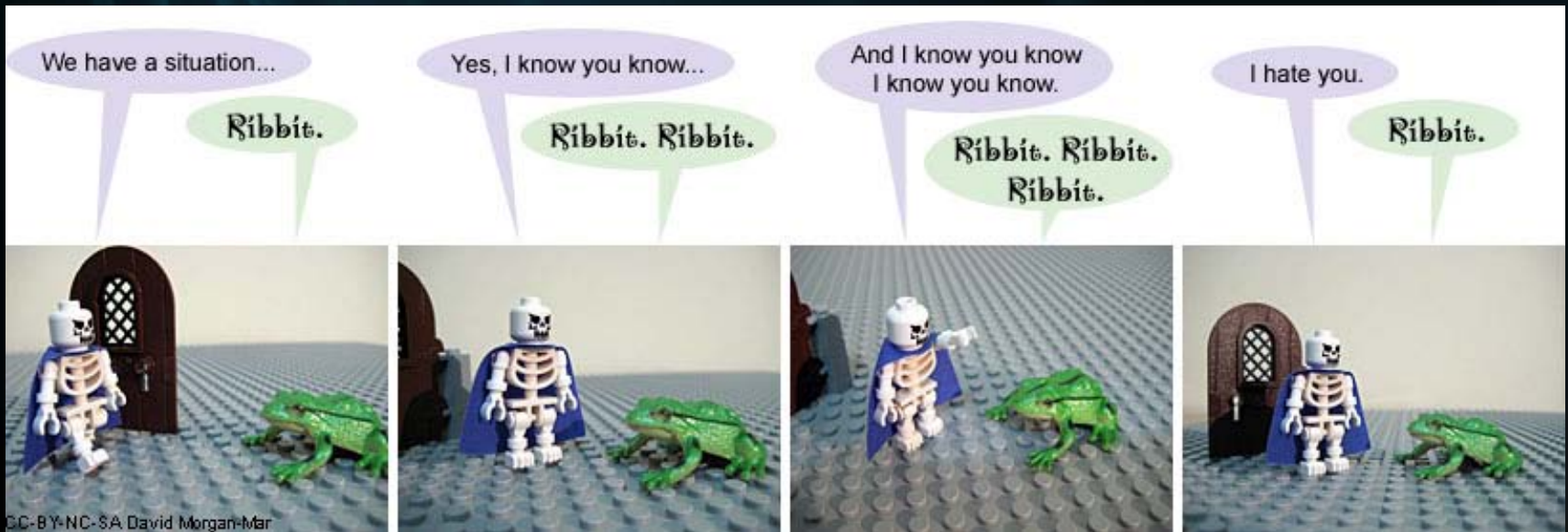
Schiffer responds

- Schiffer gives a counter example
- Miss S asks Mr. A if he wants to inspect the lemon tree tomorrow
- By this she means she wants to leave
- Unlike the American Soldier, Miss S means what she wants to communicate
- The difference lies in the audience's knowledge of intention

Mutual Knowledge*

- K_{SA}^*p iff $K_S p$ (S knows that p)
 - and $K_A p$ (A knows that p)
 - and $K_S K_A p$ (S knows that A knows that p)
 - and $K_A K_S p$ (A knows that S knows that p)
 - and $K_S K_A K_S p$ (S knows that A knows that S knows that p)
 - and $K_A K_S K_A p$ (A knows that S knows that A knows that p)
 - and so on.
- Instead of creating condition after condition after condition, Schiffer comes up with the idea of Mutual Knowledge
 - I know that our presentation is awesome.
 - You know that our presentation is awesome
 - I know that you know our presentation is awesome
 - You know that I know our presentation is awesome
 - I know that you know that I know our presentation is awesome

Lego



Mutual Knowledge*

- Having mutual knowledge seems like it would be a rather hard view to agree with
- “It should be clear (i) that I can go on like this forever; (ii) that this regress is perfectly harmless; and (iii) the phenomenon which obtains in this case is a general one: it will obtain, broadly speaking, whenever S and A know that p , know that each other knows that p , and all of the relevant facts are ‘out in the open’” (32).
- This idea of mutual knowledge successfully solves the previous 4 counterexamples

Mutual Knowledge*

- Schiffer recognizes a problem with mutual knowledge
- The meaning of philosophical writing does not depend on the audience recognizing the writer's beliefs
- “Although Grice's primary intention in writing his paper was to induce in us certain beliefs (albeit of a 'conceptual nature') about meaning, he neither expected nor intended that our reason for believing that what he wrote is true would be the fact that he intended us to believe that what he write is true” (43).

Schiffer v. Grice

- Grice wants his audience to form a belief, Schiffer wants his audience to learn a fact.
- This is a product of mutual knowledge*

Discussion Questions

- Does the class agree more with Gricean Knowledge or Schiffer Brains?
- That is, which form of communication do you think is more often used?