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Commentary on Kauffeld

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In Response to: Fred J. Kauffeld's *Grice without the Cooperative Principle*

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Introduction

In his evocative paper, Kauffeld seeks to identify and repair a problem he finds with Grice's doctrine of the Cooperative Principle (hereafter: CP). In Section 2 of this closely reasoned paper, Kauffeld discusses Grice's attempts to provide a rationale for the CP and the Maxims, arguing that it does not succeed. However, Grice's doctrine of utterance meaning (as amended by Stampe (1967)) can provide the desired account, and Kauffeld presents just such an account in Section 3. In Section 4, he offers a reformulation of CP that integrates the gains he believes have been achieved in Section 3.

Kauffeld's paper involves an intricate interpretation of the complex Gricean doctrines of implicature and meaning. I shall not be able to do justice to his interpretation-- particularly that of Section 3 (which is the core of the paper), because I have not worked sufficiently of late with Grice's doctrine of meaning, nor with Stampe's interpretation, to determine whether the solution offered in the Section 3 actually works. I do have a few thoughts about what transpires there and shall say just a few words about it later. But for the most part, in my response I shall focus on the first two sections. Before I turn to them, some preliminary comments.

Preliminary Comments

First, Grice's theory has enjoyed great favour with argumentation theorists, most of whom are content to cite CP and the maxims as having juridical force. (See Tindale, 1999; van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jacobs and Jackson, 1993). van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) replace CP what they call The Principle of Communication: "Be clear, honest, efficient and to the point"(80), but their indebtedness to Grice is evident.¹ There are exceptions, not the least of which are Grice's own critical reflections (1989) in which he revisits his earlier doctrines. Particular important here is Strand 6 in which Grice backs off of certain aspects of his position but does not withdraw or revise CP or the maxims. More critical are Kasher (1982), Gilbert (1997) and Johnson (2000). Most important is the thoroughgoing critique by Davis (1998, 12) who states: "Much of the literature is devoted to clarifying and strengthening the maxims, relating them and extending the list. But Grice formulations are still dominant."² Few, it seems, have been concerned to ask what I consider to be a question of fundamental importance: why these maxims, and *just* these maxims?³ I return to this point later.

Second, Kauffeld is not entirely consistent in his various statements about what he takes Grice's theory to be explicating. Here are just a few formulations from the early going: "the rational structure of ordinary conversational practices"(1); "the rational constitution of serious

¹ Clear—Manner; Honest—Quality; To the point—Relation; Efficient—Quantity.

² Since Kauffeld proposes to continue to use Grice's doctrine of utterance meaning, which is criticized by Davis(28-32), he seems to me to have incurred some obligation to peak to those criticisms.

³ Grice does allude to other types of maxim but those are not derived from the categories.

communication” (1); the rational structure of ordinary conversational practices” (1); “the rational constitution of serious communication” (1); “the rational structure of communicative endeavours” (1); “the rationality constitutive of ordinary conversational practices” (2). These are not, it seems to me, equivalent formulations. Serious communication and ordinary conversational practices are not at all the same. That leads to my next point.

Third, this problem may well be one that he has inherited from Grice, who is himself not consistent in the way that he describes what his theory seeks to explicate. Sometime he refers to “talk exchanges”; sometimes he refers to “conversations”; at other times to the more general category of communication. I take these three to be quite different referents. When I speak to a customs agent during a border crossing, this communication is an instance of a talk exchange but would hardly qualify as a conversation. Conversation implies a co-operative form of communication, whereas talk exchange does not. I would be reluctant to suppose that they have the same pragmatics. Moreover, though Grice offers us a principle that he believes underlies our cooperative exchanges, he does not lay down any criteria for what counts as cooperation, what falls within and what falls outside of the domain of CP. That is not unimportant because one of Kauffeld’s examples--the exchange between the prisoner and his captor (5)--trades on this very point.⁴

Fourth, in Sections 3 and 4, Kauffeld writes as if the following were more or less interchangeable: utterance meaning (6); saying and meaning something (6); seriously saying something (7); saying something (9). Now surely we (and Grice) want to distinguish between A utters p; A says p; A seriously says/says and means/asserts p. I don’t think these wavering references pose any serious problem for Kauffeld’s analysis, but an effort should be made to secure uniform reference.

Kauffeld’s Critique

Kauffeld’s paper raises these three questions. First, has Kauffeld successfully identified a problem in Grice’s attempt to justify our conversational practices? Second, does Kauffeld’s proposal (shifting from the macro level to Grice’s theory of meaning--a micro-level theory) solve that problem? Third, what are the benefits of this revised approach to CP for the study of argumentation? Since that latter question is what brings us here, I shall turn to it first.

At the end of his paper, Kauffeld advances one reason we might profit from this approach. He writes: “... the various ways in which argumentation is currently studied suffer from the absence of an adequate and embracing account of how responsibilities and obligations are incurred in communicative acts” (15). So if one were (as this author is) interested in the issue of dialectical obligations,⁵ then there is the promise of some help here. A second reason is that argument is surely a form of communication and especially of cooperative enterprise, so any further clarity shed on this territory (whose exploration was charted originally by Grice years ago) will be of help to those interested in argument. There is at least one other potential payoff that emerges at the end of the paper (pp. 12-14) where Kauffeld has provided an account of

⁴ About this I want to say it is a talk exchange but not a conversation.

⁵What I mean by this is not necessarily the same as what others (Tindale, 1999) mean.

presumptions. Since these have been the subject of increased attention lately, that is another potential benefit.

Kauffeld's Identification of the Problem

Let me start by indicating how I see the general structure of Grice's treatment—at least that part of it which concerns us. He articulates CP (and we suppose that in so doing he takes himself to be describing general features of discourse). He then presents the maxims, beginning by listing four categories (taken from Kant) under one or another of which will fall specific maxims and submaxims, the following of which will, in general, yield results in accordance with the Cooperative "Principle."

After elaborating these maxims and submaxims and showing their applicability, Grice turns to the question of the justification for CP. He notes that people do behave in these ways; they have learned to do so in childhood and continue to do so from habit. (This claim has been questioned—Gilbert (1997)—but let that pass.) Still, Grice says, he is "enough of a rationalist" to want to find a basis that underlies these facts" (29). He turns to the task of providing that basis. His first attempt explores the idea that observance of CP and the maxims could be thought of as a "quasi-contractual matter." Grice rejects this approach--though not completely, for it "may apply to some cases"--for two reasons. One is that there are too many types of exchange that fail to fit with this sort of approach--quarrelling, letter writing. But more important for Grice is the idea that the one who fails to observe the maxims has let himself down rather than his audience. In other words, observance of the maxims is not a matter of a contract we make with others but rather something one expects of oneself. Grice now attempts a different approach to the matter: "Any one who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication ... must be expected to have an interest, given suitable circumstances, in participation in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the Cooperative Principles and the maxims" (30).

About this attempt as a justification, note the following points:

First, the justification is quite open-ended and tentative. It suggests a line of reasoning, but does not attempt to fill it in. Part of the impediment, Grice says, is that he is not clear enough about relevance. He does not indicate precisely what the problem is here, but suggests that it has do with the fact that we have to allow for the fact that subjects of conversation are legitimately changed" (29).

Second, I would incline to call this justification pragmatic. It puts purpose in the driver's seat. It is because we care about the goals of our communications that we operate in ways captured in CP and the maxims.

Third, Grice's proposed justification makes no attempt to make plain the connection between CP and the maxims. Why does observation of these maxims (and no others) yield results in compliance with CP? What is the justification for these maxims? There is a hint regarding this that I shall turn to shortly. It is certainly possible that the sort of justification proposed by Grice would work. It would take the form of showing that if we are to achieve our purposes, then we must follow these maxims and/or that failure to do so defeats the aims of conversation. But if Grice was not yet sure about the role of relevance, it is easy to understand why he would hold off.

Fourth, Grice has not reconsidered nor revised nor retreated from CP or the maxims in any way. I make these points because on page 5, Kauffeld writes: “However, in reconsidering the CP...”, and refers to Grice’s “tentative revision of the CP.” On page 6 he refers to the retreat implicit in Grice’s reconsideration of his basic conversational principle as “considerable.”

Fifth, Grice does not focus in his account on obligations or commitments. I make this point because Kauffeld writes: “Grice does not withdraw from the deep insight that productive communication is guided by mutually recognized objectives that somehow *commit* speaker to acting in conformity with the maxims. Verity, relevance, perspicuity and economy are (obviously) so important to productive talk in Grice’s view that somehow acceptance of the purposes of such talk must *commit* speakers to conforming their utterances to the Maxims.” Kauffeld is looking for an account of the practical rationality of our conversational practices that makes clear the *speaker’s obligation* to follow the maxims (verity, etc). Kauffeld does not find this in Grice’s account of CP (and I agree that it is not there) and so looks to Grice’s theory of utterance meaning (a micro-theory). According to his interpretation of Grice’s theory, that when I say *p*, then I in effect commit to verity (and perhaps the others.) I am not here concerned with the mechanics of that derivation. My point is just that neither Grice’s macro account nor the micro account is focused on commitments or obligations. Kauffeld himself is interested in this issue but Grice apparently was not.⁶

Sixth, I want to comment on one reason given by Kauffeld for rejecting the Gricean contractual justification, namely that it does not square with our reactive attitudes—a criticism ultimately due to Stampe (1967) and Strawson (1968) which looms large in Kauffeld’s paper. How does the fact that we do not react to lies with cries of “unfair” count against a Gricean justification? “Were the expectation that S is to speak truthfully grounded in the supposition that S and A are engaged in a cooperative enterprise, we should expect that lying and mendacity would be criticized as species of unfairness. Instead we regard lies as deliberate attempts to induce us to believe potentially harmful false beliefs and we apportion our resentment accordingly” (4). There are two things I find puzzling about this line of objection. First, it is not clear exactly what our reactions (reactive attitudes) to lying are. They vary: some react with anger, some with frustration, others with indignation, while some would even defend such behaviour. If there is resentment, then I suspect there is also a belief that the offender has not acted appropriately, and how far is this from the sort of complaint that would go with a violation of cooperation?

A second thing that puzzles me is this. Kauffeld is objecting to the Gricean supposition that S and A are engaged in a cooperative enterprise. The argument takes the form of *modus tollens*. Its conclusion is that the maxim of quality cannot be grounded in that supposition. From this Kauffeld wants to draw the conclusion the CP does not articulate the rational principle underlying the maxim of quality. Now Kauffeld thinks that Grice was led by such considerations to abandon the contractual approach to CP and that this left him inclined toward “a somewhat broader and more tentative interpretation of the CP (4). But that is not why Grice abandoned the contractual approach, nor, as I have argued above, is it true to say that Grice offered a broader and more tentative notion of CP. But what is one to make of this objection? Note that this very

⁶ Whether Grice could derive a theory of speaker obligation/commitment from his approach to CP is another matter entirely.

same line of objection applies to the other maxims. We don't react to someone's being unclear by complaints that they have been unfair. If someone violates the maxim of relevance, we don't generally regard this as unfair. The question is whether the fact that we don't react to violations of the maxims as unfair is a reason for rejecting the idea that our exchanges are cooperative in character. Here again we stumble on the fact that the notion of cooperation has not been itself subjected to sufficient scrutiny.

Has Kauffeld identified a problem in Grice's account of CP? Yes, and no. Yes, there is a problem, but the problem is not quite as Kauffeld has described it. There is no retreat from CP and the maxims. Yet Kauffeld is right in claiming that the account given does not succeed in showing the rationality of our practices (under the guidance of CP and the Maxims).

The opacity of the linkage between CP and the maxims is something that has long perplexed me. It causes me to ask this question: How did Grice arrive at the Co-operative Principle and the supplementary maxims? It seems fairly clear that Grice arrived at CP by reflecting on his experiences in conversations and looking for a kind of unwritten policy might be said to be at work in our talk exchanges. The maxims are meant to specify principles or rules that people can be expected to adhere to in their conversational exchanges. Grice introduced them this way: "Echoing Kant, I call these the categories of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner" (26). But why should one echo Kant? What reason is there to think that these categories, utilised by Kant in his attempt to attempt flesh the categories of the understanding, will be of service in helping us find principles (maxim) that underwrite conversations?⁷ Perhaps the idea is that since our conversations involve judgements and the categories are meant to classify those, they will help us here. But that seems unlikely.⁸ For one thing, that particular Kantian doctrine depends on his theory of judgement. However, logic and communication theory have pretty well liberated themselves from taking judgement to be the focal point of argument/communication, and the predicative theory of judgement on which the Kantian doctrine depends has been widely criticised as much too limited, so we may wonder whether it will be a useful tool in helping us to identify principles that people can be expected to follow in their conversations. The problem is then that these maxims are more or less parachuted into the account, and it is never clear why these and just these are the maxims that should guide our conversations.

My conclusion is that there is no deduction, transcendental or otherwise, of the maxims from CP. The problem is not with the maxims themselves so much as with the categories under which they are placed. (I suspect that it may be the authority and appropriateness of is part of what

⁷ Recall that this doctrine emerges in KRV in *The Analytic of Concepts*, in a Chapter entitled "The Clue to the Discovery of All Pure Concepts of the Understanding" (A67-76). "If we abstract from all content of a judgement, and consider only the mere form of understanding, we find that the function of thought in judgement can be brought under four heads each of which contains three moments..." And now appears the famous table with the four headings: Quantity, Quality, Relation, Modality (not Manner).

⁸ Look, moreover, at what Grice gets out of the category of Relation. The maxim that he places under this heading -- "Be Relevant" -- has nothing to do with the Kantian category of Relation which is actually the category for different types of judgement as to their logicity: categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive.

troubles Kauffeld.) Once it is established that these are the appropriate categories, the derivation of the Maxims may proceed. (I think Grice will run into trouble here as well.⁹)

Questions about Kauffeld's Solution

Kauffeld believes that the place to look for an anchor for the (thus far) unhinged maxim of verity is the Gricean account of utterance meaning (as amended by Stampe and elaborated here). Certainly such an account has much to recommend it, particularly in showing why the speaker who says *p* may be taken as having committed himself to the maxim of verity. I want to raise three questions.

First, in selecting the maxim of truth for attention, Kauffeld has selected the maxim that seems to lend itself most readily to the sort of practical account of rationality he is after. I wonder whether this analysis will yield as promising results if we were to apply it to Relevance, Quantity and Manner? Think of one of the submaxims under Quantity: If I say *p* and it turns out that I do not have adequate evidence for *p*, have I broken a commitment? People do this all the time in causal conversation without, it seems to me, violating any rules of conversation.

Second, in selecting the function of saying which looks to influencing someone else to believe something, the maxim of truth is an excellent selection. But will this account work as well for other functions of saying: i.e., when we say something not to influence belief but just take a stand or to clarify?

Third, Kauffeld seems to think that the most appropriate way to give an account of the speaker's commitments is through the notion of utterance meaning. I suspect that more is required. Let me indicate why. It seems to me rather a stretch to think that one can get the full force of the rationality of the maxims just from the fact that A says and means *p*—even when this is unpacked by means of the rich theory of utterance meaning. Kauffeld finds in Grice. Why? Because people can violate verity without speaking at all. Moreover, violations of verity have a moral dimension that is not--it seems to me--illuminated by nor yet accounted for by a theory of meaning.

Conclusion

Kauffeld's paper points in the direction of problems with Grice, not all of which he dwells upon sufficiently to suit me. Before one can provide a satisfying account of the practical rationality of our conversational practices as guided by the maxims, one must first of all show that these are indeed the maxims that guide us. (We want to know why these and just these maxims are the ones that guides us, to refer to an earlier moment in my comment.) Moreover, whether the Gricean theory of meaning (as rendered here by Kauffeld) can do the whole job is not yet clear. Those reservations having been entered, let me say in conclusion that the paper is an exceedingly rich work of reflection on Grice that will certainly repay serious study.

⁹I plan to deal with these and other matters in my "Grice Revisited."

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