

Preface

This book examines Gricean accounts of meaning. My interest in this topic goes back to 1979, when I was bringing together thoughts for a D.Phil. thesis. I was struck by two things. The first was the essential richness of Grice's original ideas on meaning. The second was what appeared to be a rejection of those ideas by many whose work I admired. Counterexamples to Grice's analysis of meaning excited most attention in the literature that followed the publication of Grice's 1957 paper. My own interest never lay in counterexamples, but the more I learned about the development of the analysis of meaning in response to the counterexamples, the more perplexed I became by the rejection of the analysis. I wanted to understand what was wrong with an analysis that seemed to work so well. This is the reason for chapter 2, which outlines the development of the analysis in some detail. It is no exaggeration to say that this is one of the most successfully developed analyses in the philosophical literature.

One needs to draw a firm distinction between two different interpretations of the analysis of meaning, the one reductive and the other reciprocal, as I labeled it. I became convinced that it was only the reductive interpretation that many were rejecting, and that because no distinction was made between interpretations, it appeared that the analysis itself was being rejected. This tendency was encouraged by the writings of the early followers of Grice's work, Stephen Schiffer and Brian Loar, who took Grice's original analysis in a reductive direction. Schiffer wrote his book *Meaning* in 1972, but not until the early 1980s did he become explicit about his program, which he called "intention-based semantics." The aim of the program is to reduce the semantic to the psychological, and to make this reduction part of the even larger program of reducing the semantic and the psychological to the physical. (See chapter 1, section 5.) While Schiffer and Loar developed this program in their newer work, I concentrated on what was *wrong* with the reductive interpretation of Grice's early work.

Ideas in this area developed rapidly. Not only were Schiffer and

Loar exploring intention-based semantics in enormous detail; Grice himself after a long silence contributed a couple of articles to the discussion of the analysis. Yet Grice has never embraced intention-based semantics. In 1986 Richard Grandy and Richard Warner brought out a collection of papers devoted to Grice's work, some of which contributed to the issue of meaning. Schiffer himself has now written *The Remnants of Meaning*, repudiating his work in intention-based semantics. I have tried to incorporate much of this new literature into my work, but Schiffer's most recent ideas appeared too late for me to comment on them here.

The style and structure of the first two chapters are rather different from the later ones. Chapter 1 explores the place of Grice's work on meaning in the larger context of other approaches to the problem, introduces the distinction between reductive and reciprocal interpretations of the analysis, and explains the program of intention-based semantics. Chapter 2 deals with the analysis itself. In chapters 3 and 4 I explain my interpretation of what is involved in the claim to reduce the semantic to the psychological, and I present my reasons for thinking that such an approach to the understanding of meaning and mind is misguided.

The heart of the book is chapter 3. There I argue that the Gricean does not aim to support his reductive claim with the observation that we can come to know another's beliefs and intentions in advance of understanding his language. This is significant since at least some of those who reject Grice's work appear to do so on the grounds that such an epistemological asymmetry is false. But if this asymmetry does not support the reduction, what does? I argue that we must find an asymmetry advocated by the reductive Gricean but rejected by his antireductionist opponent. I consider the suggestion that the dispute centers on the ontological issue of whether there can be thought without language: the Gricean accepts such an asymmetry, and the antireductionist rejects it. I argue that the antireductionist need not reject ontological asymmetry. The dispute, I suggest, is not over the issue of ontological symmetry versus asymmetry, but over the *conception* of mind. I argue that to reduce the semantic to the psychological is to commit oneself to the idea that the mind is an essentially objective phenomenon that can be comprehended from an external, detached, and impersonal perspective. To understand meaning, we must first be clear about the conception of mind with which we are working. It is easy to argue that specific reductive Griceans are committed to a conception of mind as an objective phenomenon; the more difficult task is to argue that a Gricean is committed by his reduction of the semantic to the psychological to such an objective conception of

mind. Yet I believe this to be true, and I argue my case in chapter 4. I also suggest an alternative, subjective conception of mind, which, I argue, is incompatible with a Gricean reduction.

Over the years I have worked on this topic I have benefited from discussion with several people. In shaping the material for an Oxford D.Phil., I was supervised first by Michael Woods and then by John McDowell. John McDowell greatly aided the development of my ideas, especially in chapters 3 and 4. John Biro, Hartry Field, Adrian Moore, Stephen Schiffer, and Galen Strawson read some very early drafts. Stephen Schiffer also provided helpful comments on the completed manuscript. Both of my thesis examiners, Paul Snowden and P. F. Strawson, made helpful and encouraging comments. Katherine Morris commented usefully on chapter 4. I am grateful to several anonymous referees of the manuscript and most especially to Richard Warner, whose detailed reading of the completed manuscript proved invaluable. I would like to thank the Queen's College, Oxford for a sabbatical leave. I am indebted to Colin McGinn for years of discussion and support. Finally, I would like to thank Karen Zaffos and Steven Zaffos for their invaluable help in preparing the index.