

What Does the Third Clause Do?

Intention & Acts of Meaning Seminar, Week 4

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1 Three Clauses vs. Two Clauses

Grice (1969, 151) on the structure of meaning intentions:

“*U* meant something by uttering *x*” is true iff, for some audience *A*, *U* uttered *x* intending

- (1) *A* to produce a particular response *r*
- (2) *A* to think (recognize) that *U* intends (1)
- (3) *A* to fulfill (1) on the basis of his fulfillment of (2).

Thom Scott-Phillips (2014) (a simplified version of (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, §§11–12):

1. **INFORMATIVE INTENTION:** S intends to inform A that *p*.
2. **COMMUNICATIVE INTENTION:** S intends for A to recognize that S intends to inform A that *p*.

2 Intuitions in favor of the Third Clause

Grice’s reason for including the third clause is his intuition that there is a distinction between “deliberately and openly letting someone know” or “showing”, on the one

hand, and genuine utterer’s meaning (speaker meaning), on the other (1957). This is essentially an appeal to intuition about what counts as genuine meaning.

3 Intuitions Against the Third Clause

Schiffer (1972) and Neale (1992) construct cases designed to pump our intuitions in the other direction.

- ‘I can speak in a squeaky voice’ (uttered in a squeaky voice)
- ‘I can speak English.’
- ‘I am here now’

Again, these are appeals to our intuitions about what should count as a genuine case of meaning.

4 Explanatory Considerations Against the Third Clause

Sperber & Wilson (2015) offer arguments of a different kind based on the assumption that what we’re doing is not analyzing a concept but explaining how people communicate. Their aim is to show that leaving out the third clause gives us a

theory of communication that explains a more interestingly unified phenomenon. Although many cases of ostensive-inferential communication may involve three-claused intentions, not all do, and our theory of communication should explain the ones that don't in addition to the ones that do.

5 Explanatory Considerations in Favor of the Third Clause

In cases where the third clause is truly missing, I think it's hard to see why we should think of the second clause as a genuinely communicative intention, as opposed to something else. To see why, we need to ask what the second clause's job is.

Consider Scott-Phillips' examples of situations in which Mary eats berries in front of Paul. In SITUATION 4, Mary

SCENARIO FOUR

Mary is picking and eating berries. Peter is watching her. Mary knows that Peter is watching her, and she wants him to believe that the berries are edible. Furthermore, Peter knows that Mary knows that he is watching her and, for whatever reason, he has reason to believe that she would like him to believe that the berries are edible. Correspondingly, he believes₁ that she intends₂ that he believes₃ that the berries are edible. Mary, however, does not know that Peter believes this. After all, she has not yet made her intention manifest to Peter. Indeed, Mary's physically observable behaviour is the same as it is in scenarios one, two, and three. As yet, she has not picked berries in a way that signals to Peter that her behaviour is intended to be informative. She has not yet signalled signalhood. All that is different between this and scenario three is that here Peter believes, correctly, that Mary has an informative intention. (Scott-Phillips, 2014, 66).

SCENARIO FIVE

Mary is picking and eating berries. Peter is watching her. Mary knows that Peter is watching her, and she wants him to know that the berries

are edible. Furthermore, Peter knows that Mary knows that he is watching her, and Mary knows that Peter knows this. As such, when she eats the berries, she intends₁ that he believes₂ that she intends₃ that he believes₄ that the berries are edible. In this scenario, an important change occurs: Mary has reason to modify her behaviour. Previously, in scenarios three and four, she could satisfy the only intention she had in these scenarios simply by picking and eating berries. Here, however, she has two intentions. One of them (...intends₃ ...) is the informative intention discussed previously, and she satisfies it in the same way: by picking and eating berries. The other (...intends₁ ...) is, however, new to this scenario. It is a communicative intention, and it is not satisfied by simply picking and eating the berries. Its goal is to cause Peter to believe that Mary has an informative intention (...intends₃ ...), and so to satisfy this intention Mary picks and eats the berries in a particularly stylized, exaggerated manner. This reveals to Peter not only that the berries are edible, but also that she intends to reveal as much to him. (Scott-Phillips, 2014, 66).

So in SCENARIO FOUR, Mary has only the informative intention (3), whereas, in SCENARIO FIVE, Mary has both the informative intention (3) as well as the communicative intention (4):

3. INFORMATIVE INTENTION: Mary intends to inform Peter that the berries are edible.
4. COMMUNICATIVE INTENTION: Mary intends₂ for Peter to recognize₂ that Mary intends₃ to inform Peter that the berries are edible.

My question: why does Mary bother to have the extra communicative intention (4) in SCENARIO FIVE? Having this intention requires her to do extra stuff in order to act in accordance with it. So what's in it for her? Why bother?

Scott-Phillips' answer: communicative intentions are intentions to signal the signalhood of one's signal. But this isn't a full explanation of why Mary has *her* com-

municative intention (4). Why does *she* intend to signal the signal the signalhood of *her* signal?

The way that one explains why someone has a particular intention is to show how the intention fits into a bigger plan (Bratman, 1987). We typically form intentions to do things that are means to our broader ends. So to explain why Mary has the communicative intention (4), we should explain what broader end would be accomplished by signaling signalhood.

Two possibilities:

5. Mary wants to signal the signalhood of her signal because she thinks that this will help her to inform him that the berries are edible.
6. Mary does not think that signaling signalhood will help her to inform Peter about the berries; maybe she is confident that he could figure that out just from watching her eat them. Instead, she has some other ulterior motive for signaling signalhood. (Stephen's suggestion: she wants to take credit for helping him to find a meal.)

Notice that our explanation of Mary's communicative intention in (5) involves positing a third clause to her intention as well: she intends Peter's recognition of her informative intention (i.e., his recognition of what she is intentionally signaling) to be part of his reason for concluding that the berries are edible.

Explanation (6), by contrast, we needn't posit a third clause.

But, I submit, if (6) gives the right explanation of Mary's intention (4), then her intention (4) doesn't deserve to be called a communicative intention at all. This is because it plays no role in her broader communicative plan to inform Peter that the berries are edible. (Instead, it plays a role in a different plan, which is to take credit for helping him.) In this case, intention (4) is functioning as just another informative intention, not as a communicative intention.

On the view I am advocating, an intention counts as a communicative intention not in virtue of its form, but in virtue of the role it plays in a broader communicative plan. If the intention is not playing this communicative role, then it's not a communicative intention.

I can think of one further reason for thinking this.

Consider the a variation on Scott-Phillips' scenario 4, where everything plays out exactly the same as in his version up until the moment that Peter comes to believe that the berries are edible. Suppose that Mary recognizes that Peter has formed this belief, and only then does she turn to him and do something to make it obvious that she had been intending for him to form this belief all along. She might make eye contact, smile, nod, and pat her belly, for example, or she might just say 'I intended you to think that these berries were edible'. Now she has an intention of the form of (4). But does this intention thereby count as a communicative intention, relative to her earlier informative intention? I say no, because it is not playing the right communicative role in her earlier plan, which has already succeeded.

Instead, I would say that we should understand this new act of communication in terms of a new pair of intentions:

7. INFORMATIVE INTENTION: Mary intends to inform Peter that she has/had an informative intention (3).
8. COMMUNICATIVE INTENTION: Mary intends₂ for Peter to recognize₂ that Mary intends₃ to inform Peter that she has/had an informative intention (3).

I think this gives us a reason to think that it's not (just) the form or content of an intention that makes it a communicative intention; it's the role that the intention plays in an overall communicative plan. But this is just to say that the communicative intention has to be linked to the informative intention by means of something like Grice's third clause.

References

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