

# Grice on rationality

## Grice sobre racionalidade

Kariel Antonio Giarolo<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

My main goal in this paper is to argue that the concept of rationality is central in Grice's philosophy. Grice does not affirm this explicitly, but on several occasions throughout his work he indicates that rationality is a key concept, which enables both conversational practice and the development of philosophical theses. In order to show the importance of rationality to Grice, I will analyze his work according to three aspects: (i) logical and teleological; (ii) ethical and metaethical; and (iii) linguistic and pragmatic. In my view, in all three rationality is fundamental. Actually, a proper characterization of some of his philosophical discussions is only possible through this concept. Furthermore, I intend to show the relationships between rationality and other basic concepts in Grice.

**Keywords:** Grice, rationality, values, pragmatics, constructivism.

### RESUMO

Meu objetivo principal neste artigo é argumentar que o conceito de racionalidade é central na filosofia de Grice. Grice não afirma isto explicitamente, mas, em várias ocasiões ao longo de sua obra, ele indica que racionalidade é um conceito chave, o qual possibilita tanto a prática conversacional, quanto o desenvolvimento de teses filosóficas. Com o intuito de mostrar a importância da racionalidade para Grice, irei analisar sua obra em três aspectos: (i) lógico e teleológico; (ii) ético e metaético; e (iii) linguístico e pragmático. Em meu ponto de vista, em todos os aspectos racionalidade é fundamental. Na verdade, uma adequada caracterização de algumas de suas discussões filosóficas somente é possível através desse conceito. Além disso, pretendo mostrar as relações mantidas entre racionalidade e outros conceitos básicos em Grice.

**Palavras-chave:** Grice, racionalidade, valores, pragmática, construtivismo.

## Introduction

Herbert Paul Grice is best known in the history of philosophy for his classical works on philosophy of language and philosophical pragmatics. Throughout his work he focuses on human linguistic behaviors and the mental processes underlying them. The analysis of linguistic behavior shows, for example, that people are rational creatures and that rationality is fundamental for the communicative process of transference and understanding of meanings. Most of his philosophical contributions, especially his theory of conversational implicatures, played a central role in discussions on semantics and pragmatics for a long time. The reflections on the relations between the linguistic meaning of certain expressions and the meaning that such expressions

<sup>1</sup> PhD in Philosophy (Universidade Federal de Santa Maria). Professor at Instituto Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Campus Pau dos Ferros. BR-405, s/n, 59900-000, Pau dos Ferros, RN, Brazil.  
E-mail: karielgiarolo@gmail.com

acquire in some contexts involving speakers and hearers are a crucial landmark in the development of the philosophy of ordinary language. Grice's approach aims at, among other things, showing the apparent discrepancies between classical logic and natural language. Papers like *Meaning* (1957), *Logic and Conversation* (1975) and others are mandatory readings to anyone focusing on linguistic meaning.

In the late 1970s, Grice applied his linguistic reflections to wider philosophical fields, in particular to discussions associated with ethics (metaethics) and metaphysics. These new philosophical interests yielded two books, posthumously published, namely *Aspects of Reason* (2001) and *The Conception of Value* (1991). The former contains a detailed and interesting analysis of the philosophical conception of rationality. Grice's main goal is to clarify and determine the nature of the concept of reason and to draw its philosophical implications. His analysis is basically logical and linguistic, and based on earlier reflections on language. In the second book, Grice presents a metaphysics of value and argues that rationality is the attribute which defines what he calls "person". Human beings, because they are rational, are not mere biological creatures, but belong to a different kind of metaphysical entity called "person". The basic difference between "person" and "biological creature" is that the latter have rationality as an accidental property, whereas "persons" are essentially rational. Rationality, therefore, is the essential characteristic of "person". Furthermore, rationality renders possible the construction of moral values.

This philosophical conception of rationality plays a fundamental role in Grice's posthumous writings. However, I intend to argue in this paper that the same is true, although implicitly, of his previous work on philosophy of language and linguistics. Rationality, in my view, is of fundamental importance also in Grice's work on linguistic practice. Conversation is essentially a cooperative activity in which it is necessary that the speakers follow basic rules that enable meanings to be transferred. My central thesis is, therefore, that the conception of reason, or rationality, is the most important concept in Grice's work. I will divide my paper in three sections: in (i) I present the conception of rationality in *Aspects of Reason*; in (ii) I reconstruct the distinction between biological beings and "persons" and the importance of rationality for the construction of values; and in (iii) I show that rationality is also a basic concept in Grice's claims about language.

## Part I – Aspects of Reason and rationality in logic and language

In searching for a systematic analysis of the Gricean conception of rationality, probably the most appropriate thing is to start by *Aspects of Reason* (2001). Although this is not the chronological order of Grice's work, in *Aspects of Reason* the conception of rationality is presented in a very clear way and, certainly, it is the core of his thesis on the subject.

In the late 1970s, Grice gave a series of lectures in Stanford and Oxford in the so-called *John Locke Lectures*. The results of these lectures were eventually expanded and modified by Grice himself until his death in 1988, and, in 2001, Richard Warner published an edition of these lectures entitled *Aspects of Reason*. Grice, in this book, aims to determine what the idea of a rational being is, as well as the philosophical consequences that can be achieved by the exercise of rationality<sup>2</sup>. The conception of rationality is defined as the capacity and interest that the attitudes, decisions, beliefs, etc. of one who has such property are well grounded or validated and that consequences can be drawn from the reasoning involved in the rational process. Rationality, as Grice says, is a minimal competence present in reasoning. The concept of reasoning, in turn, is determined in terms of the notions of inference and preservation of value.

The characterization of the concept of reasoning is essential to clarify the relations between theoretical (or alethic, as Grice prefers) and practical reason. Grice defends the idea that, ultimately, we do not have two reasons operating independently, but that alethic and practical reason are aspects of a single notion of reason<sup>3</sup>. Rationality operates both in the cognitive and in the practical sphere (see *Reply to Richards*, Grice, 1986, p. 72). The later analysis performed by Grice on the indicative and imperative sentences, the formalizations of these sentences, and subsequently the analysis of mixed inferences necessarily required the concept of rationality.

In the two first chapters of *Aspects of Reason*, Grice does what seems to be a topography (or mapping) of reasons and tries, among other things, to explain the relations between alethic and practical reason. In order to elucidate his philosophical program about the subject, Grice seeks: (1) to determine the concept of reasoning; (2) to identify examples of problematic reasoning; (3) to distinguish flat rationality from variable rationality; (4) to present the different kinds

<sup>2</sup> In the philosophical tradition, we can find two proposals very similar to this, namely, the Aristotelian and the Kantian ones. They also tried, based on the clarification of the nature of reason, to make the passage from the idea of a rational being to its philosophical consequences. To Aristotle reason is the essential characteristic of a human being, allowing one to distinguish it from the other creatures. Reason is associated to men's end, to the contemplative activity, to the exercise of contemplation of metaphysical truths. According to Grice, in Aristotle we have theoretical rationality as central. On the other hand, in Kant, although there is the thesis defending the existence of a single faculty of reason, we have the moral necessity of adherence or acceptance of the categorical imperative. In the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Kant (2010, p. 175, 2011, p. 194) argues that, linked up with speculative reason, practical reason has the primacy.

<sup>3</sup> Grice holds a similar position to the Kantian one. Rational being has a single faculty of reason which may have a theoretical and a practical use. However, differently from Kant, Grice does not defend the idea that there is a primacy of one of them over the other.

of reason (explanatory, justificatory and personal reason); and (5) to investigate if in the ordinary sense 'reason' has the same or a different sense in 'alethic reason' and 'practical reason'. Consequently, "he considers different ways in which the word 'reason' is used, classifies these uses into different categories, and illustrates these categories with examples" (Chapman, 2005, p. 145).

Grice, unsatisfied with the previous approaches about the nature of reason (Aristotle and Kant, in particular), takes as his starting point the idea that reason must be understood as the faculty manifested in the construction of reasoning. After the investigation of what is understood by reasoning it would be possible to draw philosophical conclusions from the conception of reason. Reasoning is defined by Grice, at first, as follows:

*[...] reasoning consists in the entertainment (and often acceptance) in thought or in speech of a set of initial ideas (propositions), together with a sequence of ideas each of which is derivable by an acceptable principle of inference from its predecessors in the set (2001, p. 5).*

Later, he expands this notion by the introduction of the will:

*The burden of the foregoing observations seems to me to be that the provisional account of reasoning, which has been before us, leaves out something which is crucially important. What it leaves out is the conception of reasoning as an activity, as something with goals and purposes; it leaves out, in short, the connection of reasoning with the will (2001, p. 16).*

These two passages deserve special attention: in the first, Grice, despite using a classical conception of logical inference, defines neither what precisely the notion of inference is nor what the nature of these supposed initial ideas or propositions is. However, taking into account his subsequent reflections, it seems clear that Grice defends the idea that reasoning must be understood as a process where, in general, we are interested in deriving sentences from a particular type, which must preserve some sort of value. Reasoning should be considered as a faculty of extension of our acceptances by valid forms of transition from a set of initial acceptabilities to new ac-

ceptabilities: in this process there must be transmission of value from the premises to the conclusion. "By 'value' I mean some property which is of value (of a certain kind of *value*, no doubt). Truth is one such property, but it may not be the only one; and we now reached a point at which we can identify another, namely, *practical* value (goodness)" (Grice, 2001, p. 87). This means that if the propositions that are components of the inferences have 'truth' as their value, then the proposition derived from them, by the principles of inference, should also have 'truth' as its value. Similarly, if we are using propositions that are not theoretical, but practical, and the value is 'goodness' and not 'truth', then all that is derived from them should preserve 'goodness'. "We have sentence-radicals which qualify for 'radical truth' or 'radical falsity'; some of those which so qualify, also qualify for 'radical goodness' or 'radical badness'" (Grice, 2001, p. 88).

The second passage quoted above indicates a commitment to pragmatic aspects. Reasoning, affirms Grice, is an activity and, as an activity, it must be directed to goals and purposes. There is an element of will associated with this characterization of reasoning and it is the will that leads human reasoning to achieve these goals and purposes. This position seems right, since it would be unusual to build reasoning and inferences entirely devoid of purposes<sup>4</sup>. When we think reflexively, generally, we want to solve problems, and "reasoning is characteristically addressed to *problems*: small problems, large problems, problems within problems, clear problems, hazy problems, practical problems, intellectual problems; but *problems*" (Grice, 2001, p. 16).

Reason, in short, is the faculty that appears in the production of reasoning. Nevertheless, the issue is not so simple. Grice assumes that for the proper characterization of the nature of reason it is necessary to investigate other elements associated with reasoning, like the different kinds of rationality, reasons and so on. Based on that, he makes a number of important distinctions to clarify the point. He distinguishes, first, flat rationality from variable rationality, then the three different kinds of reasons: explanatory reasons, justificatory reasons and justificatory-explanatory reasons (or personal reasons). It is only possible to think about the relation between alethic and practical rationality after making these distinctions.

The first distinction proposed by Grice is between flat and variable rationality (cf. Grice, 2001, p. 20-21, 28-36). This distinction is based on the idea that we can understand the structure of rationality in two different ways: on the one

<sup>4</sup> Susan Stebbing, a famous logician from the early twentieth century, proposes a similar idea. According to Stebbing (1930, 1939), in ordinary speech we are often engaged in a process directed to some practical end. Thinking logically is to think in a relevant way for the initial purpose of thinking. Actually, every reflexive thinking is directed to an end. The process of reflexive thinking is known as inferring. "Thinking [we can say reasoning] involves asking questions and trying to find answers to these questions" (Stebbing, 1939, p. 27). Therefore, reflexive thinking has a natural end, the conclusion of the reflection. Reflective thinking consists in pondering upon a set of facts so as to elicit their connections. The various stages in this process are related to the conclusion as the grounds upon which it is based. Stebbing (1930, p. 9) calls these grounds 'premises'. Furthermore, exactly like Grice, Stebbing says that reflexive thinking emerges from a problem to be solved and is throughout controlled by the conditions of the problem and directed to its solution. For more details about Stebbing, see Chapman (2013).

hand, rationality is a flat (non-variable) capacity, that allows us to apply inferential rules; and, on the other hand, rationality is a variable (degree-bearing) capacity, in which interpretation is an excellence or competence, and is differentiated into a variety of subordinate excellences or competences (see Grice, 2001, p. 27).

In variable rationality we have a conception of rationality in which the structure of reason is fragmented, variable. In this sense, there is not a fundamental rationality from which other types of rationality are derived. Variable rationality is a set of different kinds of rationality operating at the same level. These different rationalities can be considered as excellences. Differently, in non-variable rationality, or flat rationality, differences of degree are not admissible. According to Grice, flat rationality is a basic conception of rationality, it is ultimate and not defined in terms of variable rationality. Thus, flat rationality is central with respect to a type of creature called Rational Being (in the Aristotelian sense), underlying any other kinds of reason.

These two capacities, however, are connected. The problematic point, nevertheless, is how to determine which kind of rationality really is the most fundamental one. *Prima facie*, we are led to accept a first pattern, in which flat rationality is basic and variable rationality is merely an unfolding, an increase of excellences. Variable rationality, in this sense, is obtained by derivation, according to appropriate inference methods, from flat rationality. This first pattern characterizes a specification of minimal skills of the rational being. A proposed analogy to exemplify the first pattern involves chess-playing. Flat rationality can be thought as the rules that allow someone to play chess, to know the position and the movement of the pieces. Variable rationality, in turn, is thought as being able to play chess well. The knowledge of the rules of the game is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition to be a good chess player and win chess games. Consequently, variable rationality could be thought as being additional to this essential notion of rationality.

However, in contrast with this first pattern, Grice presents another pattern in which variable rationality is primary in relation to flat rationality. In this pattern, flat rationality has its origin in variable rationality through a limitation of it. The second pattern does not require a minimal competence in every rational being, something which is required by the first pattern.

Analyzing the two patterns, Grice concludes that both are problematic. The first one, for example, has difficulties to specify what the minimal competences of the rational being are and, mainly, how to derive variable rationality from flat rationality. On the other hand, the second pattern is unable to determine the borders of variable rationality, i.e., is un-

able to stipulate a minimal degree of rationality. Because of these problems, Grice (2001, p. 34) rejects both patterns and presents a third pattern seeking to give a reasonable answer to the question about the structure of reason. The third pattern takes into account characteristics of the other two, but assumes basically that rationality consists in an attempt, a demand, to be rational. In this pattern there is a parallel between the two previous patterns. Someone is rational if, on the one hand, he exhibits some degree of rationality and, on the other hand, if he exhibits what Grice calls proto-rationality. The two parallel patterns, in the third pattern, are the following:

*Pattern A*

*X exhibits rationality iff x exhibits some degree of [variable] rationality.  
No minimum (determinate) degree of rationality.*

*Pattern B*

*X exhibits rationality iff x exhibits proto-rationality.*

*There may be degrees of proto-rationality, but to be rational x does not have to exhibit any of these; he might fall off the scale of proto-rationality but fall within (non-variable rationality), since he is seeking to fall on the scale of proto-rationality. [One who has no proto-rationality may still be rational, since rationality is a matter of seeking proto-rationality].*

This proto-rationality can be thought simply as a tendency to be rational. In *Reply to Richards* (1986, p. 83-84), Grice explicitly affirms that one of the main features of reason is to operate in pre-rational states. An example of this is when we produce syntactic-semantic satisfactory utterances according to the grammatical rules of a language without the aid of a derivation in some syntactic-semantic theory. It is not necessary to exhibit degrees of rationality to be rational. The ability to produce transitions from an initial group of propositions to a new proposition through an inference rule does not require that such rationalization be present in a conscious way. "[...] it requires at most that our propensity to produce such transitions be dependent in some way upon our acquisition or possession of a capacity to reason explicitly" (Grice, 1986, p. 84).

After distinguishing between flat and variable rationality, Grice (2001, p. 37-43) performs another fundamental distinction to clarify the relations between alethic and practical reason, namely, the distinction between three kinds of reasons (explanatory, justificatory and personal reasons)<sup>5</sup>.

Pure explanatory reasons can be explained by their factivity. We clearly see that in a sentence like "The fact that

<sup>5</sup> In Baker (2010, p. 185) we read: "In this work [*Aspects of Reason*] he [Grice] reaffirmed one of his central positions, that reason is univocal, that there is a common structure of theoretical and practical reasons. He also clearly distinguishes the two important features of reasons for action, that reasons explain and that they justify. Grice proposed three classes of both practical and theoretical reasons: a purely explanatory, a purely justificatory, and a hybrid of the two".

the girders were made of cellophane was the reason why the bridge collapsed” there is a causal relation between two facts, ‘the girders made of cellophane’ and ‘the bridge collapsed’. Reason, in this case, is a cause. The paradigmatic form of explanatory reasons is “That B is (was) a (the) reason why A (The reason why A was that B)”. Therefore, B is a causal explanation of A: both A and B are facts.

Justificatory reasons, in turn, are reasons ‘for’ or reasons ‘to’. This kind of reason may conceal a psychological verb like ‘think’, ‘want’, ‘decide’ or may specify an action. Justificatory reasons, consequently, do not exclude person-relativization. The paradigmatic form is “That B is (was) (a) reason (for X) to A”. An example provided by Grice (2001, p. 38) is “The fact that they were a day late was some (a) reason for thinking that the bridge had collapsed”. In this case, B is a justification to think, do, or want A, and A is non-factive.

Justificatory-explanatory reasons (or personal reasons) are the third kind of reasons. The main difference with respect to the other two kinds of reason is that personal reasons demand a total person-relativization. In this case, there is facticity for A and facticity or non-facticity for B. Personal reasons contains features of the other kinds of reasons and have, therefore, a hybrid nature. They are special cases of explanatory reasons, because they do explain, but what they explain are actions and certain psychological attitudes. The canonical form is “The reason(s) for A-ing was (were) that B (to B)”. An example is “John’s reason for thinking Samantha to be a witch was that he had suddenly turned into a frog” (cf. Grice, 2001, p. 40).

Justificatory reasons, concludes Grice, are the most important ones, because they are contained both in explanatory and in personal reasons. They lie at the heart of other varieties of reason (cf. Grice, 2001, p. 67). Although, in Grice’s view, we have different kinds of reasons, they are not disconnected, because justification is always present. Explanatory reasons justify facts; justificatory reasons justify facts by psychological states; and personal reasons justify the agents to think that something is the case and to act in some way (personal reasons are final causes). Moreover, justificatory reasons are the essential pieces from which good arguments are constituted.

But the point that makes justificatory reasons really special is the fact that they are divisible into alethic and practical reasons. If we suppose that there is a barrier separating the alethic from the practical field, we will easily see that on both sides of this barrier certain words, called by Grice *common modals*, such ‘must’, ‘ought’, ‘should’, ‘necessary’, etc. appear constantly in the specification of justificatory reasons. These words are connected with a justificatory feature and they can be found in alethic and practical inferences. Grice’s idea (2001, p. 69) is that an analysis of justificatory reasons leads naturally to an analysis of modals, which express specific types of justification, and to mode-makers, which are intimately connected with psychological attitudes needing justification. From this perspective Grice approaches the relation between alethic and practical reason and the examination and formalization of alethic and practical sentences.

In the pursuit of a common framework for alethic and practical sentences, Grice breaks down the sentences, formalizes them and introduces some operators: a rationality operator, a mood operator and a radical. He introduces, consequently, mood operators to alethic and practical sentences and a common rationality operator. The mood operators are formalized as ‘┌’ and ‘!’. The former corresponds to alethic sentences and the latter to practical sentences. The common rationality operator is formalized as ‘Acc’ and can be translated to natural language as ‘it is acceptable that’, ‘it is reasonable that’, etc.

In alethic sentences we have  $Acc + \text{┌} + r$ , where the symbol ‘┌’ indicates that the content of the radical  $r$  is being judged, while in practical sentences we have  $Acc + ! + r$ , where the symbol ‘!’ indicates that the content  $r$  is an imperative, a command. Furthermore, every symbol is subordinate to its predecessor in the series. We can see the distinctions in the following example:

- (1) Peter must be studying now. (A)  
 (2) Peter, you must study now! (B)

The verb ‘must’ appears in the two sentences. In the first sentence, the verb has an alethic sense, while in the second it has a practical sense. ‘Must’, in (1), indicates a state of affairs, the state of affairs that Peter must be studying now. In (2), ‘must’ indicates that the sentence is an imperative, an order that Peter should perform. It is possible to rewrite the two sentences in Grice’s terminology as follows:

- (1’)  $Acc + \text{┌} + r$  (A)  
 (2’)  $Acc + ! + r$  (B)

The sentences (1’) e (2’) replace (1) and (2). Grice introduces the rationality operator, then the mood operator, and lastly the content of the sentence, the radical. In the third chapter of *Aspects of Reason*, Grice (2001, p. 73) defines the judicative operator, ‘┌’, as ‘it is the case that’ and the volitive operator, ‘!’, as ‘let it be’. Now we have:

- (1”) It is acceptable that it is the case that A  
 (2”) It is acceptable that let it be that B

The symbol that Grice uses to indicate the judicative operator is the same symbol used by Frege in his *Begriffsschrift*, in logic symbolism. The symbol that indicates the volitive operator is a simple exclamation mark. Finally, the radical ‘r’ is essentially the content of the sentence. Grice (2001, p. 50) assumes that there are similarities between his approach and Hare’s approach in *The Language of Morals* (1952), when Hare distinguishes *phrastic* from *neustic*. Grice (2001, p. 50) says:

*An initial version of the idea I want to explore is that we represent the sentences (1) “John should be recovering his health by now” and (2) “John should join AA” as hav-*

ing the following structure: first, a common "rationality" operator 'Acc', to be heard as "it is reasonable that", "it is acceptable that", "it ought to be that", "it should be that", or in some other similar way; next, one or other of two mood-operators, which in the case of (1) are to be written as '┌' and in the case of (2) are to be written as '!'; and finally a 'radical', to be represented by 'r' or some other lower-case letter. The structure for (1) is Acc + ┌ + r, for (2) Acc + ! + r, with each symbol falling within the scope of its predecessor. I am thinking of a radical in pretty much the same kind of way as recent writers who have used that term (or the term 'phrastic').

However, given that Grice is a philosopher worried about how we use language in ordinary life, his approach is not restricted only to a purely formal analysis. The mood operators used until this moment are not enough to express everyday language. Thinking in this way, he introduces new modal operators and some elements from his linguistic/pragmatics theory. The first habitat, says Grice (2001, p. 51), where mood differences have their origin is in speech. In order not to extend the discussion, I will not treat these points, but it is important to note that after formalizing how mood differences occur in speech and thought, Grice builds different kinds of theoretical and practical acceptabilities (including prudential acceptabilities, which, in the last two chapters of *Aspects of Reason*, give rise to an elegant approach to the philosophical conception of *eudaimonia*). These acceptabilities are the way in which rationality operates in the construction of reasoning. Every time that we build alethic or practical arguments we use the acceptability operator. In this sense, in a logical and linguistic context, the concept of rationality is extremely important to Grice. An approach to *eudaimonia* and ends is only possible if we can clarify adequately the concept of reason and its cognates.

## Part II – Rationality and value

Section I shows that *Aspects of Reason* is the core of the Gricean conception of rationality. In a very clear way, Grice makes a series of important distinctions trying to clarify what is the philosophical conception of reason and what consequences we can derive from it. Now, in this section, my main goal is to reconstruct some central ideas on ethics and metaphysics of morals, basically in *The Conception of Value* (1991). If in *Aspects of Reason* Grice examines the logical features of reasoning, in *The Conception of Value* he proposes a meta-

physical treatment of rationality and values. Rationality is conceived as an essential property of the metaphysical entity called 'person'. In this sense, in this second book, also posthumously published and resulting from Grice's Carus Lectures in 1983, there is a philosophical application of the logical characterization of reason in a metaphysical context. Grice explains why rationality is a central feature of persons and that, through it, rational beings are able to construct values and to reach the ends of human life<sup>6</sup>.

As Grice himself says in *The Conception of Value* (1991, p. 91), the Carus Lectures contain many ideas that are obscure, fragmentary and ill defended. However, with some effort, it is possible to systematize some of these obscure ideas, especially for my purposes, the relations between rationality and value. The Carus Lectures are divided into three lectures: the first and the second lectures concern the objectivity of values, while the third one focuses on the relation between metaphysics and value. I want to explain the discussion found in the third lecture, because this is where Grice presents the distinction between biological beings and persons and introduces the notions of "Metaphysical Transubstantiation" and of "Humean Projection", which are essential to understand the Gricean constructivist program in *Metaphysics of Morals*.

The study of ethics has for long been concerned with the analysis of value judgments (cf. Chapman, 2005, p. 158). To understand the meaning of moral sentences it is fundamental to explain what moral concepts are. In this perspective, it is possible to identify at least two different approaches to the problem of moral concepts: an objectivist and a non-objectivist (or subjectivist) approach. The first maintains that moral concepts, like 'good', 'wrong', etc., have an ontological existence that is independent of human beings. On the other hand, a non-objectivist approach maintains that moral concepts exist, but that they are constituted by human mental activity. Consequently, the question about the objectivity of values is not a mere linguistic question, but an ontological one.

Grice's starting point in the discussions on ethics is an attack on the non-objectivist conceptions of value, especially J.L. Mackie (1977) and Philippa Foot (1972). In *Inventing Right and Wrong*, Mackie (1977, p. 15), for instance, holds the thesis that "there are no objective values." To defend this thesis, known as 'error theory', Mackie uses two main arguments: (i) the argument from relativity, and (ii) the argument from queerness. The first argument focuses on the different cultural moral codes: the idea is that different cultures have different moral codes. According to Mackie, by empirical observations we can see that there are great variations in cultural codes for the conduct of life and that moral disagreements are frequently characterized by an unusual degree of unsociability. However, the problem is very simple: if there is a realm of

<sup>6</sup> Grice explicitly assumes a teleological (Aristotelian) position both in the posthumous books (*Aspects of Reason* and *The Conception of Value*) and in the linguistic papers. In our ordinary life, as moral agents, we are looking for a finality to our lives; likewise, in our linguistic practice, we use language to some purposes, especially to transfer information. Consequently, all our activities, conscious or not, are addressed to specific ends.

objective values, why can one culture (or more) access these objective values and other cultures cannot? A possible example is monogamy: in some cultures, monogamy is regarded as a correct practice, that people have to perform, but in others it is regarded as a wrong practice or a practice of little worth. "This diversity, Mackie suggests, argues that moral values reflect ways of life within particular societies, rather than drawing on perceptions of moral absolute values external to these societies" (Chapman, 2005, p. 160). The second argument, the argument from queerness, claims that our moral properties are of a very strange sort, different from anything else in the universe. Furthermore, in order to identify these strange properties we would need some special faculty of moral perception completely different from our ordinary ways to know or to access something. We don't have perception of moral values in the same way that we have perception of a color, like the blue in a shirt. Therefore, to Mackie, in objectivist accounts of value, there would be an odd relation between non-natural and natural properties.

There are at least three different reactions to Mackie's error theory (cf. Grice, 1991, p. 26): (1) that of those who see it as false, pernicious and a threat to morality; (2) that of those who see it as a trivial truth hardly worth mentioning or arguing for; and (3) that of those who regard it as meaningless or empty, as raising no real issue. Grice's analysis will prioritize the third reaction. This reaction is specially associated with Richard Hare, to whom statements about objectivity of moral values do not even have meaning. Grice presents the discussion between Mackie and Hare and says that both are wrong. To Grice, Mackie's position is not totally clear. He oscillates between a positive and a negative version of objectivity: on the one hand, the positive version maintains that to assign objectivity to something is to say that it belongs to the basic "furniture" of the world; on the other hand, the negative version consists in assigning objectivity to something denying that statements about it are reducible or eliminable.

To Grice, the two arguments used by Mackie to defend the anti-objectivist conception (or moral skepticism), namely, the argument from relativity and the argument from queerness, are inconclusive. If the argument from queerness (which is the strongest of Mackie's argument) is right, for instance, then it implies that many of our sciences are not possible. Arithmetic, for example, deals with numbers, but numbers are something very strange, in the same sense that moral values. We have no empirical access to numbers, but even so we can't say that they don't have some kind of reality. Although it is impossible to stumble on a number or touch it, in mathematics we actually use them to solve real problems, by performing arithmetical operations. In this sense it is completely plausible to state that numbers have some objective existence, even if they are mere human constructions.

Thinking in this way, Grice, in the third of his Carus Lectures, argues in favor of a constructivist conception of values. Values, not only moral values, but all values, are part of the world that we live in, although they are human constructions. By the exercise of our rationality we are able to "create" the values that help us to guide our own lives. In order to pursue this constructivist programme, Grice needs three things (Cf. Grice, 1991, p. 70): (i) a set of metaphysical starting points, i.e., things that are metaphysically primary; (ii) a set of recognized routines or procedures, by means of which non-primary items are built up on the basis of more primary items; and (iii) a theoretical motivation for proceeding from any given stage to a further stage, a justification or some purpose for making that move.

In the third lecture, Grice shows a great interest in philosophy of biology and, in particular, in the relations between biology and metaphysics. One of his fundamental discussions, in order to identify the metaphysical primary entities, is the distinction between accidental and essential properties of creatures. In contrast with accidental properties, "the essential properties of a thing are properties which that thing cannot lose without ceasing to exist (if you like, ceasing to be identical with itself)" (Grice, 1991, p. 79). In this sense, essential properties provide us a criterion of identification of those things<sup>7</sup>. Grice claims that the essential properties of this or that thing include, frequently, finality properties, properties which consist in the possession of a certain detached finality (cf. Grice, 1991, p. 80).

The distinction between accidental and essential properties is important to Grice in order to show that there are two different kinds of entities (metaphysical substance-types): human beings and persons. The contrast between these two creatures is based on the status of their properties, particularly, rationality. In the substance-type 'human being' or 'biological being' rationality appears as an accidental property. Biological beings don't need rationality in order to exist: they could continue to exist simply by using their instincts. This idea doesn't mean, obviously, that no instances of biological beings possess rationality, but it means that in them this feature appears only accidentally. Differently, in substance-type persons, the attribute (or complex of attributes) called 'rationality' is an essential property (cf. Grice, 1991, p. 84). Thus, persons are defined in terms of rationality. This is an important change and Grice argues that there are two metaphysical routines underlying this idea (these routines render possible the Gricean constructivist project): Metaphysical Transubstantiation and the Humean Projection.

The passage from biological beings to persons is called Metaphysical Transubstantiation (cf. Grice, 1991, p. 81-85; 1986, p. 102). The central idea of this routine is that the two substances, human beings and persons, have the same prop-

<sup>7</sup> In Logic, a property is essential to an individual if he had that property in all possible worlds. 'Essence', therefore, is a modal notion. Grice, in *The Conception of Value*, sustains the idea that there is a difference between 'essential' and 'necessary' properties. On one hand, essential properties provide criteria to identify particular objects, while, on the other hand, necessary properties are the properties that a given object should have.

erties, but differently arranged. By the Metaphysical Transubstantiation, the properties of the biological type are redistributed (not invented), originating the new metaphysical substance. As a consequence, rationality becomes an essential characteristic that enables the new metaphysical entity to look for ends. To overcome the complexity and the variation of the environment, biological beings start to use in a systematic way the property of rationality, rather than create new instincts. Rationality, therefore, is a good substitute to instincts: through rationality it is easier to produce appropriate responses to the different stimuli and difficulties provided by the world around us. But mainly, “[this routine] permits us to say that there is a kind of creature whose essence, nature, or function is to evaluate. Grice hoped to show that the notion of value is indispensable” (Baker, 1989, p. 506).

In *Reply to Richards* (1986, p. 102), Grice exemplifies the routine as follows:

*Let us suppose that the genitor has sanctioned the appearance of a biological type called humans, into which, considerate as always, he has built an attribute, or complex of attributes, called **rationality**, perhaps on the grounds that this would greatly assist its possessors in coping speedily and resourcefully with survival problems posed by a wide range of environments, which they would thus be in a position to enter and to maintain themselves in. But, perhaps unwittingly, he will thereby have created a breed of potential metaphysicians; and what they do (so to speak) to reconstitute themselves. They do not alter the totality of attributes which each of them as a human possesses, but they redistribute them; properties which they possess essentially as humans become properties which as substances of a new psychological type called **persons** they possess accidentally; and the property or properties called rationality, which attaches only accidentally to humans, attaches essentially to persons.*

As it is argued by Baker (1989), the first routine, consequently, allows that this new metaphysical substance is able to value. The Metaphysical Transubstantiation routine operates primarily to turn human beings into persons and therefore valuers. The process, says Chapman (2005, p. 164), derives from the capacity, incidentally present in human beings, for rationality. So, the attribution of rationality to a kind of metaphysical entity person allows them to think in terms of values and ends. In this sense, values and ends are only associated with persons.

But, anyway, how are values constructed by persons through rationality? The answer requires a second routine, the Humean Projection.

According to Grice (1991, p. 88), this routine, basically, is an operation in which some attitudes are projected on

onto the world. In other words, this routine consists in taking a specific mode of thinking and then transforming it into an attribute. This attribute is not ascribed to thinking, but to the thing which was thought. In this sense, thinking of a thing as good, by this operation, makes that the thinking becomes a property of that thing. The Humean Projection explains how our judgments of value ascribe a property to something in the world. Because we are rational, then we can, by the presence of certain qualifying conditions, attribute value to some item, we can project features on the world that in principle are considered only features of our states of mind.

Grice (1991, p. 88) exemplifies the Humean Projection in the following way:

*To take an example with which I am presently concerned, we might start with a notion of valuing, or of (hiphenatedly, so to speak) thinking-of-as-valuable some item x; and, subject to the presence of certain qualifying conditions, we should end up with the simple thought, or belief, that the item x is valuable; and in thinking of it as valuable, we should now be thinking, correctly or incorrectly, that the item x has the attribute of being valuable.*

Basically, Grice's idea in the Carus Lectures is to show that some values are objective and that there is a rational demand for these absolute values. This demand can only be satisfied by finding a being whose essence is able to apply forms of absolute value. We need absolute values, and, as Grice claims, only persons can provide it. Persons are obtained by the first routine, Metaphysical Transubstantiation, and next by the second routine, the Humean Projection, through which the rational being, the valuer, can attach objective values to things. Consequently, to construct values a rational being is necessary. Clearly, in *The Conception of Value*, rationality, as well as in *Aspects of Reason*, is the basic concept. Without rationality it is impossible to perform these metaphysical operations as well as the entire Gricean constructivist program.

## Part III – Rationality and linguistic works

In this final section my purpose is to show that rationality is a central aspect also in Grice's linguistic works. In contrast with *Aspects of Reason* and *The Conception of Value*, in the previous texts Grice does not admit explicitly what is the role played by rationality. However, considering his work as a whole and considering some passages in the papers published in life, it is possible to sustain that the linguistic practice is only possible because we are using, perhaps in a non-conscious way, our rationality. I will defend now that there are evidences, especially in *Logic and Conversation* (1975), *Meaning Revisited* (1989c) and even in *Meaning* (1957), pointing to

the fact that Grice sustains that rationality is the basic feature that makes possible the transference and understanding of meanings. Further, in *Aspects of Reason*, Grice clearly presents an analysis of the linguistic process that requires the rationality operator.

Grice's conception of meaning is first presented systematically in the famous paper *Meaning* (1957). In his semantic/pragmatic analysis of language, the central concept is the concept of 'to mean'. Differently from classical semantics (found in Frege's seminal paper *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* (1997), especially)<sup>8</sup>, Grice sustains a conception of meaning in which the speaker's intentions have a central role in the determination of the linguistic meaning. So, the meaning of a sentence is essentially connected with the intentions of the speaker when he utters the sentence. In Grice's view, when a speaker means something with an utterance, he wants, firstly, to produce an effect in the hearer, and secondly, he wants that the hearer recognizes that the speaker wants to produce that effect. In this sense, the meaning is not, like in the traditional conceptions of meaning, necessarily a feature of propositions. To determine precisely the meaning of an utterance, it is necessary to consider, primarily, the relations between speakers and hearers. But evidently not only that. Additionally, Grice sustains that for an appropriate understanding of the speaker's words the satisfaction of a series of conditions is required: to know the speaker's identity, the time of the utterance, the context of the utterance, the meaning of the words at the moment when they were stated, the relations between the sequence of words, etc.

According to Chierchia (2003, p. 246), by the speaker's meaning we take what the speaker wants to mean through a given expression in some circumstance of the speech. Grice recognizes that it is necessary to distinguish between what the words literally or conventionally mean and what the speakers want to signify by using the words in some contexts. So, in *Meaning*, Grice presents linguistic meaning as grounded in the speaker's meaning (a perspective which will be developed in various later writings, particularly a chapter of *Logic and Conversation*). Linguistic meaning is associated with the linguistic conventions that exist in some linguistic contexts or in a community of speakers. Speaker's meaning, in contrast, depends on the speaker's intentions to communicate some informa-

tion, i.e., it must be defined in psychological terms. An interesting difference between them relates to the stability of the meaning: the linguistic meaning, even being consequence of conventions, is much more stable than the speaker's meaning. Given that the linguistic meaning is shared by a community, generally, for the success in communication, the meanings of the expression have to be respected. On the other hand, the speaker's meaning can change quickly. A series of factors can change the speaker's linguistic behaviors and sometimes it is not easy to identify what are the speaker's intentions in the speech. Anyway, in *Meaning*, Grice (1957, p. 385) affirms explicitly that "A [a speaker] meant nonnaturally something by x [an utterance]' is roughly equivalent to 'A uttered x with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention'".

In *Meaning*, Grice makes an important distinction between two kinds of meaning: between *natural sense* and *non-natural sense*. This distinction is based on the role of the verb 'to mean' in given sentences. For example, "Those spots mean (meant) measles" is a case of natural sense. In turn, in the sentence "Those three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that the 'bus is full'" we can identify a case of nonnatural sense. In the second case there is a conventional feature involved in the determination of meaning. The correct interpretation of the message depends on understanding the intentions of the one who emits it. In this case it is not natural to think that the rings mean that the bus is full. To understand properly the meaning of the sentence, and especially the meaning of the words between quotation marks, the hearer should have a belief that the signal intends to mean that<sup>9</sup>.

However, speakers, in general, use linguistic expressions in many different ways and sometimes their use does not follow the grammatical and even the current ways in which those linguistic expressions are normally used. It is very common that in the conversation a speaker uses intentionally certain expressions or sentences that violate the conventional meaning. In cases like that, the meaning of the expression in the language and the meaning intended by the speaker could not coincide. In order to perform an adequate transference of meaning and consequently achieve the mutual comprehension, a conversational background is demanded. In this sense, conversation to Grice is essentially a cooperative activity.

<sup>8</sup> In *Über Sinn und Bedeutung*, published in 1892, Frege presents the classical distinction between 'sense' and 'reference' (or 'meaning', as some translators prefer). According to Frege, proper names and sentences have a sense and a reference. In a rough way, the sense of an expression is its cognitive content and the reference an object (in the case of proper names, the object designed by the sign, in the case of sentences, a truth-value). Although widely criticized, this conception of meaning remained for a long time the main theory about the subject.

<sup>9</sup> After the publication of *Meaning*, Grice's conception of meaning received a number of criticisms. Probably the most important was from Searle in *Speech Acts* (1969) According to Searle, Grice's analysis of meaning is problematic for two reasons: first, his conception is unable to explain adequately in what sense meaning can be related to rules or conventions. To Searle, this approach cannot show the connections between someone meaning something by his words and what that really means in the language. To illustrate the problem, Searle presents the classical example of the American soldier in WWII that utters a sentence in German to the enemy forces attempting to create in the enemies a belief that he is German. The problem is that the meaning of the sentence and the intended meaning are different. Second, Searle thinks that Grice, when he defines meaning in terms of the effects produced in the hearer, confuses illocutionary with perlocutionary acts. Grice defines meaning in terms of intending to perform a perlocutionary act, but uttering a sentence, to Searle, is a matter of intending to perform an illocutionary act, not a perlocutionary one.

Those who are participating in a conversation should follow some basic rules in order to reach mutual understanding. "Conversation was assumed to take place between two people who alternate as speaker and hearer, and to be concerned simply with the business of transferring information between them" (Chapman, 2005, p. 98).

Grice, in his most famous paper *Logic and Conversation* (1975), develops further ideas about meaning and introduces the notions of conventional and conversational implicatures. By implicature we can understand, basically, what we want to say when we utter some expression or, in other words, what are intentions that we seek to communicate in the speech. According to Grice, some implicatures are conventional, for example, when in some context certain terms acquire meaning by convention, and some implicatures are conversational. A conversational implicature is, usually, an aspect of the speaker's meaning that is not part of the conventional meaning. This kind of implicature is the most interesting one to Grice, and, in *Logic and Conversation*, he aims to determine exactly in what it consists.

In a conversation it is required that the speakers follow some basic directives for the transference of meaning to be successful. The basic principle governing conversation is called by Grice the *cooperative principle*. Such principle says: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1989b, p. 26). However, besides the cooperation principle, for a successful communication there are some maxims that should also be considered. These maxims are important because if they are not respected, then the understanding of the meaning attached to the words of other people may be hindered. Using Kantian terminology, Grice (1989b, p. 26-27) distinguishes four different kinds of maxims: (1) quantity, related to the quantity of information to be provided; (2) quality, associated to the veracity of the information; (3) relation, related to the relevance of the information; and (4) manner, related to how what is said is to be said. These four maxims, combined with the cooperation principle, the context, and the conventional meaning of the words, will lead to an appropriate transference of meanings.

But what is the relation between these conversational maxims and the cooperative principle with conversational implicatures? According to Grice (1989b, p. 28), the conversational maxims and the conversational implicatures connected with them are specially connected with the particular purposes that talk (and talk exchange) is designed to serve and is primarily employed to serve. A conversational implicature occurs, for example, when one of the maxims that govern the speech is violated. It occurs, for instance, when the meaning of the intended utterance is different from the usual meaning. Irony is a good example of violation of a conversational maxim that originates a conversational implicature. Anyway, conversational implicatures should be ruled by rational principles.

Now, I can introduce the discussion about rationality concerning linguistic practice. In some passages Grice explicitly sustains that rationality is fundamental in conversation. To him, conversation is basically a cooperative activity in which speakers should follow certain rules that allows transference and apprehension of meanings. As I said before, the basic principle that rules this issue is the cooperative principle, which can be understood as a species of *rationality principle*, as argued by Asa Kasher (1976).

According to Kasher (1976), the cooperative principle, in contrast with the maxims, does not make reference to the means used to reach the ends in conversation. In some cases of implicature, the cooperative principle does not give a satisfactory response, for example, about what is the advantage in some contexts of using a tautology or other non-implicated sentence. Because of such problems in Grice's approach, Kasher replaces the cooperative principle by a more general principle called *Principle of Rationalization*. The basic idea underlying this substitute principle is the optimization of the means to reach an end. Given a desired end, one is to choose that action which most effectively, and at the least cost, attains that end. The rationalization principle says basically that there is no reason to assume that the speaker is not a rational agent; The speaker's statement, says Kasher, in the context of utterance, supplies the justification of his behavior. Every time that we engage in a conversation, we suppose that our interlocutor is a rational being and that the ends of the linguistic practice will be reached. So, after all, we have to assign rationality to the other speaker. And not only that: to understand the intentions of the speaker, it is necessary to suppose that he is following a habitual way of thinking and reasoning. It is totally impossible to think that we can achieve the ends in conversation without keeping in mind that rationality is operating, even in an unconscious way.

The cooperative principle, given that it defines patterns of linguistic behavior in certain contexts, rests on the idea that in all stages of communication it is always possible to identify the purpose or direction of the talk. This means that, together with conversational maxims, the cooperative principle has a teleological function: mutual understanding. If the cooperative principle sustains that the speakers follow conversational rules in pursuit of communicative ends, then it is reasonable to think that there is some kind of rationality and mutual attribution of rationality working in the conversation. To illustrate that, we can read in *Logic and Conversation* (1989b, p. 28):

*As one of my avowed aims is to see talking as a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational, behavior, it may be worth noting that the specific expectations or presumptions connected with at least some of the foregoing maxims have their analogies in the sphere of transactions that are not talk exchanges.*

And some lines later (1989b, p. 29):

*I am, however, enough of a **rationalist** to want to find a basis that underlies these facts, undeniable though they may be; I would like to be able to think of the standard type of conversational practice not merely as something that all or most do **in fact** follow but as something that it is **reasonable** for us to follow, that we **should not** abandon.*

The respect for conversational maxims and the cooperative principle is considered as something reasonable, or rational, in the sense that it is expected that if someone is concerned with the central objectives of communication, then it is also expected that he is interested in participating in conversations that are fruitful in some way. We can understand other people because we have a common background and we respect a minimal degree of rationality. Grice's conception of meaning, in my view, in order to be correctly understood, has to be analyzed in terms of central ideas found in *Meaning* and *Logic and Conversation*. As Chapman (2005, p. 102) rightly affirms, there are in Grice three different levels of meaning at which a speaker may be committed to a proposition: (i) what is said, (ii) conventional meaning (including conventional implicatures), and (iii) what is conversationally implicated. The most attractive level, obviously, is the level of conversational implicatures. However, his conception of meaning, even when a conversational implicature is used, depends on the intention of the speaker. So, the linguistic practice is dependent on reason. It is not possible to understand the intentions of the speaker if the hearer is not able to identify linguistic patterns and contextual elements. The hearer is able to realize this because he is a rational agent. He shares with the speaker the same rules that govern communication. If our interlocutor acts in an irrational way, then communication is impossible.

In *Meaning Revisited*, Grice returns to these important discussions about the nature of meaning. Attempting to identify the main features of the concept of meaning and the relations among language, thought and reality, Grice affirms that in discussions about meaning questions of value might arise. In this paper, Grice tries to expound the relations between meaning, rationality and value, something very similar to what he makes in the posthumous books. Grice affirms (1989b, p. 298) that he has "strong suspicions that the most fruitful idea [in the attempt to identify the relations between these concepts] is the idea that a rational creature is a creature which evaluates." According to Grice, there are some problems connected with meaning in which questions of value might arise. I don't want to explain these problems here, but in *Meaning Revisited* it becomes clear that meaning is connected with rationality and value.

Anyway, if in his linguistic papers Grice only suggests that rationality is attached to questions of meaning and lan-

guage, in *Aspects of Reason* he categorically shows the relations between meaning and rationality. As I showed in the first section, Grice, in his formal analysis of practical and alethic sentences, introduces some modals and mood operators, attempting to elucidate the structure of these sentences. Nonetheless, in all formalizations, the rationality operator is the basic one. In order to exhibit the logical features of sentences, at a first moment, Grice analyses simple logical sentences. But the analysis of utterances is not restricted only to the logical field. Because of this, afterwards, he introduces new operators to explain the logical features of indicative, imperative and interrogative sentences in natural language. For that, he needs to consider the relations between speakers and hearers. So, the new operators introduced are essentially associated with his views on meaning, especially regarding the process of transference and understanding of the meaning of utterances. To illustrate this, we can take as an example the case of indicative sentences: given that Peter and John are talking and Peter says to John "The snow is white." In Grice's analysis (2001, p. 52) this utterance could be formalized as: 'U (the speaker, Peter) to utter to H (John) a sentence of the form  $Op1 + p$ , if U wills H judges U judges p'. In this case, and in the other variants, the utterance falls within the scope of the rationality operator, *Acc*.

To Grice (2001, p. 69), the intended effect of the utterance on a hearer is one or another of a set of psychological attitudes with respect to some propositional content. Each one of the operators corresponds to an element that belongs to this set. Grice uses these operators in accordance with his views about meaning. According to these views, what a speaker means is explained in terms of the effect that he intends to produce in the hearer; what a sentence means is explained in terms of the directives related to the use of the sentence in a primitive (basic) way aiming to induce in the hearer some effect. In fact, we see clearly the intrinsic relations maintained between the Gricean semantic/pragmatic conceptions and the logical/formal conceptions. I sustain that it is sufficient to show that rationality does not have a secondary importance in the conceptions of meaning and conversation, but a primary importance instead.

## Conclusion

The discussion about the conception of rationality in Grice deserves more attention by commentators and obviously a more adequate and exhaustive analysis. Anyway, I believe that in this paper I was able to show that this concept occupies a central role in Grice's philosophy and is completely different from any other concept. Although concepts like 'meaning' and 'implicature' are more famous, 'rationality' is at the core of his philosophy and makes possible the plausibility of the other concepts. Section I explained that, in *Aspects of Reason*, rationality is connected with the notions of 'reasoning' and 'reasons' and is defined in terms of inference and preservation of value. Section II showed the Gricean constructivist

program in metaphysics and the role played by rationality in the construction of objective values. Finally, Section III tried to show that rationality operates also in the linguistic field and is the element which ultimately renders possible the linguistic practice.

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