

ABSTRACT
THREE MISTAKES ABOUT SEMANTIC INTENTIONS
Michael Devitt

(A) In virtue of what does a speaker using a name or demonstrative refer to *x*? A popular answer is: because he *intends to refer to x*. I have four objections. (1) This answer, unlike another popular one – because *he has x in mind* – is too intellectualized to be even a good starting point. (2) It is theoretically incomplete: In virtue of what did the speaker intend to refer to *x*? (3) Once completed it is redundant. (4) It is misleading.

(B) What explains the speaker meaning of a sentential utterance? A central idea of Gricean “intention-based semantics” is that this meaning is constituted by the speaker’s intention to communicate a certain content to an audience. I follow Chomsky, in thinking that “under innumerable quite normal circumstances...people mean what they say or write, but there is no intent to bring the audience...to have certain beliefs or to undertake certain actions.” The basic act of speaker meaning is one of *expressing a thought*. There is no theoretical motivation for the stronger requirement that the speaker be intending to communicate that thought to an audience.

(C) It is standard among Griceans to believe that there is some constitutive constraint on what a speaker can intend by an utterance, a belief arising from one about a constraint on intentions in general. The latter constraint alleged varies from the astonishingly strong “positive” one that X cannot intend to do A unless X believes that she will do A to the much weaker “negative” one that X cannot intend to do A unless she lacks the belief that she cannot do A. I argue that there are no such constitutive constraints on intentions.