I. The Background

A. While there is a causal character to non-natural meaning, it is not to be analyzed simply in terms of causation. This is reflected in Grice’s dismissal of Stevenson’s view (215-7), and in the insistence that the effect/response in the listener be under their control (220-1). (With respect to the latter, think here about the relationship between meaning and free will—is that connection relevant?)

B. This view is speakercentric, depending as it does on speaker intention. The listener/audience is involved, but only via the speaker’s conception of them. The intention that matters here is the primary intention, or what Kaplan has called the “directing intention”, i.e., the intention describing the most proximal action the speaker wishes to perform vis-à-vis the listener. (Even so, this is one of the first times we have seen the listener explicitly folded into the theory of meaning.)

C. The kind of view that Davidson develops in “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs” bears a debt to Grice—meaning, for Davidson, is not conventional but dependent on the exigencies of circumstance. The analysis Grice offers is sensitive to the circumstances in which speaker and listener find themselves. Meaning, for Grice, is much more free form than we have encountered so far.

D. As such, the theory is more subjective, in the following sense: the meanings determined are dependent on the subjects involved. This is constrained in important respects, but there is an explicit connection with the beliefs of the speaker as supplying the meaning of the utterance.

II. The Analysis

A. Grice proceeds by considering suggested analyses of non-natural meaning from the perspective of the paradigm case. As he argues in
“Meaning Revisited”, he sees natural and non-natural meaning as related to one another—you can get to non-natural meaning from natural via a series of stages that involve movement from the simply causal to the mutually intentional. He does it in this fashion:

1. **Step One:** Speaker produces an utterance that has an effect on the listener, where the effect gives the meaning. This could be natural meaning, as he indicates in the control discussion on 220-1. It could be merely causal on both sides.

2. **Step Two:** Speaker produces an utterance with the intention of producing an effect on the listener, where the effect gives the meaning. Here we move away from brute causality on the side of the speaker but not the listener. We move away by making the production a *voluntary* one on the part of the speaker. (See “stage one”, 292-3.) Still unacceptable. *Here, though, it seems like we can start asking after the meaning of the action, since there is an intention behind it.*

3. **Step Three:** Speaker produces an utterance with the intention of producing a belief in the listener, where the belief gives the meaning. This gets us closer, as it ties speaker intention to cognitive effects in the listener, which is the kind of relationship that meaning forges in the paradigm case. Still could be merely causal on the side of the listener; the speaker might intend to create a causal connection for the listener without the listener appreciating the fact of her involvement.

4. **Step Four:** Speaker produces an utterance with the intention of producing a belief in the listener, where the belief gives the meaning, and the listener recognizes this fact. Here the listener is involved in “creating” the effect/meaning, but not because the listener necessarily wants them to be. The potential for duplicity and subterfuge makes this non-paradigmatic and not a full-fledged case of non-natural meaning. (See “stage two”, 293.)

5. **Step Five:** Speaker produces an utterance with the intention of producing a belief in the listener, where the belief gives the meaning, and the listener is intended to recognize this fact. Now the speaker wants the listener to recognize what their up to. They are now knitted together into a mutual relationship that involves a certain kind of move, viz., a certain kind of cognitive movement mediated by a noise or a mark. But this is still not a full-blown
case of non-natural meaning, as the effect could be produced by something other than the recognition, e.g., the case of John the Baptist, 218. (See “stage three”, 293.)

6. **Step Six:** Speaker produces an utterance with the intention of producing a belief in the listener, where the belief gives the meaning, and the listener is intended to recognize this fact and the speaker intends the belief to be produced by that recognition. A complex intention, but this gives us a robust case of non-natural meaning. The speaker/listener arrangement is fully mutual, with the listener making the intended cognitive move for no other reason than the utterance of the speaker and their own interpretive judgment. They are fully in control of the effect, in the sense that they have the ability to refrain from embracing the effect. (See “stage five” and “stage six”, 294-6.)

**B. How to Think of This:**

1. Both are causal, so they really only differ in degree along this dimension. Do they differ in kind, though?

2. Non-natural meaning involves intervention of intentions, introducing at least some of the following elements: intelligence, teleology, mutuality, society, … It is a joint production of speaker and listener. It depends on freedom, at least to the extent that voluntary action in general does.

3. The contrast would appear to be between meaning as information (natural meaning) and meaning as purpose (non-natural meaning). Dretske, Perry, et al. have argued for a reduction of the latter to the former. If possible, this would suggest a difference in degree; if not possible, then a difference in kind. (However, this does serve as a sort of response to those who are skeptical of meaningfulness in a naturalistic world.)

4. This makes meaning a function of communication.

**III. Criticism**

A. The intentions involved are crazy complex. Two year olds are supposed to form and execute these? After all, they do communicate.

1. Keep in mind that only the primary intention is relevant here.
2. All behavior is crazy complex from an intentional perspective, so this isn’t really adding to that in any obnoxious way.

B. This is just Humpty Dumpty taped up to look respectable. Speaker and listener make the meanings up as they go!

1. It isn’t conventional, this is true, and it is the case that speakers have more control on this approach than on others we have considered.

2. However, since we have mutual intentions, they are constrained by mutual expectations. You can’t go Humpty Dumpty because you would not be able to form the requisite intentions. Things are constrained.

3. Further, Grice shows the way to use this to get word meaning in the James Lectures, as we will see.

C. Isn’t this just viciously regressive? Consider: “S wants A to think ‘p, because S wants A to think “p, because S wants …”’ You need to have something like this to make things go.

1. Circularity is an issue, this is true.

2. But think of the importance of idealization and optimality. We would get a regress at the ideal limit, but we don’t operate there.