

In this reading response, I will analyse the Cooperate Principle (CP) proposed by Grice, and explain how the maxims do not accurately represent conversation. I do not agree with the basic assumption of CP.

*In order to attain their goals, people approach the conversational endeavour in a rational way, and that conversation is a joint activity that requires cooperation.*

This is a basis of many of my arguments. Although conversations require cooperation, it is not uncommon for there to be some level of deceit. People lie to get out of trouble, to get what they want, to make themselves feel better, etc. These break all maxims. Even if we work only under the assumption, there are cases when the maxims are broken, even when all parties are willing to cooperate.

### **Maxim of Quantity**

In short, this maxim means one should provide exactly the information required for the exchange, no more and no less. Firstly, I do not believe “information required” has a clear definition. This is assuming both (or more) parties of the conversation understand what needs to be said. This does not generally hold in conversations, especially those made to request for information. A simple example is asking for directions. The one who gives out directions almost always assumes some basic knowledge. In Toronto, for example, they would assume the asker knows how to take the TTC, and has access to GPS services. In the University of Toronto, one would assume students would know where Gerstein is. They would then say something like “... on the left of Gerstein.” When prompted, they may give a description of the building which satisfies the one looking for directions. This is until they reach King’s College Circle, and realise there are more than one building that fits the description. These examples are to show that it is a common occurrence for one or both parties to *believe* sufficient information has been supplied, when it has not. There are also examples of the opposite case. People may have to provide explanations, disclaimers and such purely for legal reasons. One has to sign a disclaimer every time they go skydiving, for example. For a skydiver, this is rarely to inform them of their legal rights, nor to emphasise the inherent danger of the activity, as all of these are what they know and have considered. Then the contribution is more informative than required. Finally, there is the most obvious example where, for a number of reasons, one or more parties in the conversation wish to lie or mislead others. One can withhold information or supply excess irrelevant information to mislead.

### **Maxim of Quality**

Obviously, this maxim is broken when one wishes to deceive the other. Even when there is mutual cooperation, there are examples where this maxim is broken.

*Do not say anything for which you lack adequate evidence.* People who bring up pseudoscience often do not have adequate evidence. Even people who bring

up actual science lack adequate evidence. A lot of what we have is built on trust. We take information for granted, which goes against the maxim, even if the information provided is indeed correct.

*Do not say what you believe to be false.* This can still be broken under circumstances that could not be easily waved of as “deceit”. This happens during the exchange of pleasantries. A false reply of “I’m fine” to a “how are you?” says nothing about the willingness of both sides to cooperate. When discussing illness, especially terminal illness, family and friends, or the patient themselves may appear optimistic when they are not. In fact, people sometimes lie in order to cooperate. When one party is late to a meeting, the other party may say “no worries” when they do not feel so. But this is a rational choice made to foster cooperation, as they do not want any bad feelings between both parties. In all cases, people may not feel they are making a conscious choice to lie. They may feel “forced” to say something they do not want, or it may simply be a reflexively response in the case of the exchange of pleasantries.

*Try to make your contribution one that is true.* This is broken when one of the above is broken. If one provides information where they lack adequate evidence, they evidently have not tried. For all of the examples I listed in the paragraph above, one can easily avoid the lie if they examine everything they are about to say. The reader will obviously have their own examples, where even in a cooperative environment, one has clearly not tried to make their contribution true.

### **Maxim of Relation**

*Be relevant.* Again, similar to the maxim of quantity, what does “relevant” mean? One does not always know what is relevant or not. In an engineering context, one would often provide, or be provided with more than enough information. There is usually excess information that never gets used. Now, one can argue that the information was still relevant, because engineering is a field where it is safer to have too much information than too little. This returns us to the question “what does relevant mean”. A maxim cannot be ambiguous, or else one can be simultaneously following and breaking a maxim, defeating the purpose of a maxim.

### **Maxim of Manner**

*Be orderly.* When it comes to planning, some prefer brainstorming sessions (or the different processes in Praxis II) where idea generation is not orderly at all. Spontaneous conversation can be purposeful, and may even be more effective than “orderly” conversation, where a set format may interrupt logical flow, or introduce unnecessary components to the conversation.

*Avoid ambiguity.* Ambiguity often rises from inaccurate assumptions. A simple example is the word “it”. In some circumstances, it may not be immediately obvious what “it” is referring to. The speaker may find it obvious, but the

listener may not. This can happen in any kind of conversation. In an engineering context, one engineer may assume prerequisite knowledge from the other in order to speak concisely. This introduces potential ambiguity, yet it is perfectly fine to ask for clarification. Ambiguity *is* avoided and *should* be avoided, but it is present in many conversations.