Grice’s Maxims

Conversational postulates (Grice)

In 1967 (published in 1975) Grice wrote about the "rules of conversation". The rules are, of course, not really rules at all but rather are a set of conventions that can be used to characterize the interaction which takes place during a conversation.

Grice (1967; 1975xxx)

Rules of conversation:
1. Quantity: Be as informative as required.
   Be no more informative than required.
2. Quality: Say only what you believe to be true.
3. Relevance: Be relevant.
   Don't be ambiguous.
   Don't be obscure.
   Be succinct.

Of course, Grice's rules seem to characterize an ideal conversation in which the sole objective is the transfer of information. As Lakoff pointed out in one of her articles, the transfer of information is often secondary to what I would term "phatic" communication—politeness, making the other person feel good, building and maintaining bonds, etc. Thus, when there is a conflict between information transfer and politeness, politeness often wins out.