

ON METAPHOR:
A SEMANTIC THEORY OF FIGURATIVE DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Contrary to popular linguistic analyses and theories of meaning, metaphorical expressions (or figurative discourse) are actually far clearer and informative, far more semantically communicative, and, even at times, far more technically precise than are "literal" expressions (or nonfigurative discourse). I make a case for this view of figurative discourse by first arguing that, in terms of what metaphors mean, present metaphorical meaning stands on its own, semantically autonomous from any past "literal" meaning or paraphrase, but that, in terms of how metaphors work, present metaphorical meaning draws on or "piggy-backs" on past semantic values and resemblances. I accordingly call this linguistic phenomenon of the way in which metaphorical linguistic mechanisms work a "dual-system-semantics." Second, concerning the relation between metaphorical truth-value and literal truth-value, I deny that metaphorical truth-value is substantially a function of some corresponding paraphrastic "literal" truth-value, even as I deny that metaphors are non-truth-functional. That is, I seek to counter the "reductionist claim" that metaphorical expressions are truth-functional purely in virtue of some literal paraphrases. I also consider briefly the nature and anatomy of "dead metaphors" and how this linguistic phenomenon is, unlike with higher living organisms, a matter of degree.

On Metaphor: A Semantic Theory of Figurative Discourse

Contrary to popular linguistic analyses and theories of meaning, I believe that a case can be made for the view that metaphorical expressions are actually far more clear and informative, far more semantically communicative, and, even at times, far more technically precise than "literal" expressions. In order to develop this view of metaphor, I must first examine the relationship between metaphorical meaning and literal meaning. In doing so, I argue that the "literal" paraphrase of a metaphorical expression does have *some* bearing upon metaphorical meaning, but only in terms of how metaphors work, rather than in terms of what they say.¹ Second, I must consider the relationship between metaphorical truth-value and literal truth-value. Here I deny the claim that metaphorical truth-value is substantially a function of the truth-value of corresponding literal expressions, that is, I deny the claim that metaphorical expressions have semantic values only in virtue of non-figurative or literal expression which are said to bear a special paraphrastic relationship to such metaphors. Finally, I consider some implications of my views, specifically concerning "dead metaphors," code languages or jargon, and the question of metaphorical speech acts.

I.

That paraphrasing breaks into the linguistic world of metaphor is undeniable. Such metaphor paraphrasis is clearly a phenomenological fact of metaphorical or figurative discourse. This fact, however, is best accounted for by distinguishing the "linguistic mechanism of metaphor" (*how it says* what it says) from the "cognitive content of metaphor" (*what it says*); and by means of this distinction, it is my hope to detach substantially what has commonly been understood as metaphor paraphrasis from metaphor truth-value!

How is paraphrasis crucial to metaphor? What part does paraphrasis play in the interpretation of metaphor? Consider for a moment the following correlation between kinds or instances of paraphrasis:

[1] (a) paraphrasis, by means of synonyms² (or synonymous expressions), is *to* literal expressions (or speech acts), *as* (b) paraphrasis is *to* metaphorical expressions (or speech acts).

¹ John Searle gives the following useful summary: "Comparison theories assert that metaphorical utterances involve a comparison or similarity between two or more objects (e.g. Aristotle; Henle, 1965), and semantic interaction theories claim that metaphor involves a verbal opposition (Beardsley, 1962) or interaction (Black, 1962) between two semantic contents, that of the expression used metaphorically, and that of the surrounding literal context" (John R. Searle, "Metaphor," in *Philosophical Perspectives On Metaphor*, Mark Johnson, ed., Minneapolis, 1985, 257). I, on the other hand, construe metaphors as expressive of a single distinct present semantic content generated by means of a particular metaphorical linguistic mechanism.

² I am using the term "synonymy" in a general literary or grammatical sense, rather than in a strict philosophical sense, as in the similarity between the semantical or lexical content of two expressions. Thus my usage of synonym is distinct from its usage in the debate over analyticity and synonymicity, found in Quine and subsequent responses to him. I am not using "synonymous" in the sense of a logical one-to-one identity relation, but rather as it is commonly used in hermeneutics and literary criticism: "*synonym*, n., ... a word having the same or nearly the same meaning in one or more senses as another of the same language." "*synonymous*, a., ... expressing the same or nearly the same meaning." "*synonymy*, n., ... 1. the quality of expressing the same or nearly the same meaning by different words.... 5. in rhetoric, a figure by which synonymous words are used to amplify a discourse" (*Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Collins-World, 1975, p. 1851).

Two relations need to be examined here: the major correlation "as" between (a) and (b), and the two minor correlations "to" within (a) and (b).

First, what kind of correlation might be drawn between (a) and (b) *vis-a-vis* the connective "as"? Basically, the connective of the major correlation "as" is used in a *prima facie* non-technical sense, that is, in terms of similarity, broadly or functionally conceived (possibly even, analogically). Second, the two minor correlations, denoted by "to," also refer to a mainly functional relation. At this point, I am only suggesting: (a) the relevance of synonyms to literal expressions is functionally similar to (b) the relevance of paraphrasis to metaphors. In order to balance and draw out the correlation a bit further, consider the following revision of [1]:

[2] (a) the paraphrasis of literal expressions commonly relies on synonymous expressions, *as* (b) the paraphrasis of metaphorical expressions generally relies on "the prior values," "ranges before transference of labels,"³ or prior lexical or common (idiomatic) definitions and uses of the metaphorical terms or "focus" (Black's "associated commonplaces").⁴

³ For Searle's notion "prior values" see note 10 below. Concerning "ranges before transference of labels," Nelson Goodman explains, "Briefly, a metaphor is an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting..., where a term with an extension [a schemata, a set or family of labels] established by habit is applied elsewhere under the influence of that habit; there is both departure from and deference to precedent.... The aggregate of the ranges of extension of labels in a schema may be called a realm. It consists of the objects sorted by the schema—that is, of the objects denoted by at least one of the alternative labels. Thus the range of 'red' comprises all red things while the realm in question may comprise all colored things.... Partly by thus carrying with it a reorientation of a whole network of labels does a metaphor [give clues] for its own development and elaboration.... Where the new labels had no prior denotation, such supplantation does not constitute metaphor under the definition given.... But when a label already has its own denotation and in replacing what it exemplifies usurps another, the new application is metaphorical.... Metaphorical force, requires a combination of novelty with fitness, of the odd with the obvious. The good metaphor satisfies while it startles. Metaphor is most potent when the transferred schema [set of labels] effects a new and notable organization rather than a mere relabeling of an old one" (Nelson Goodman, "Languages of Art," in Johnson, 123-35). See also his "Metaphor as Moonlighting," where he states, "[metaphor] involves withdrawing a term or rather a schema of terms from an initial literal application and applying it in a new way to effect a new sorting either of the same or of a different realm.... In terms of multiple application of words—and other symbols—and of schemata consisting of them, we can understand how various figures of speech are related to each other and to literal discourse, and also how metaphor constitutes so economical, practical, and creative a way of using symbols. In metaphor, symbols moonlight" (also in Johnson, 224-26).

⁴ As to his notion of "commonplaces," Max Black writes, "consider the statement, 'Man is a wolf'. Here, we may say, are two subjects—the principle subject, Man (or: men) and the subsidiary subject, Wolf (or: wolves). Now the metaphorical sentence in question will not convey its intended meaning to a reader sufficiently ignorant about wolves. What is needed is not so much that the reader shall know the standard dictionary meaning of 'Wolf'—or be able to use that word in literal senses—as that he shall know what I will call the system of associated commonplaces.... The effect then of (metaphorically) calling a man a 'wolf' is to evoke the wolf-system of related commonplaces" (Max Black, "Metaphor," in Johnson, 73-74).

Note also Black's distinction between "frame" and "focus" (Black, 63-82). In the example, "The chairman plowed through the discussion," Black denotes the word "plowed" the focus of the metaphor, and the rest of the sentence the frame (Black, 65). In other words, (1) the specific 'metaphor words' (focus) are those words used metaphorically, bearing metaphorical content or affective impact; (2) the 'metaphor context' (frame) would be the broader sentential, semantic context, not directly exhibiting or bearing the 'metaphor words'. Crucial to Black's distinction here is the symbiotic nature inhering between these two metaphor categories, or, as he puts it, "how the presence of one frame can result in metaphorical use of the complementary word, while the presence of a different frame for the same word fails to result in metaphor" (Black, 66).

Vague as it is, on one level the major correlation between (a) and (b), both in [1] and [2], is flawed and breaks down. That breakdown centers on the details of the minor correlations in [1] denoted by the preposition "to" in the phrases "synonyms (or synonymous expressions) are 'to' literal expressions" and "paraphrasis is 'to' metaphorical expressions." This breakdown concerns an extrinsic/intrinsic distinction between properties applied to literal expressions on the one hand, and to metaphorical expressions on the other. That is:

[3] while (a) synonymous expressions are semantically *extrinsic* to correlative literal expressions to which they are synonymous, (b) the prior values, the ranges before transference of labels, or the past common lexical (idiomatic) definitions of the metaphorical term(s) or "focus" are *intrinsic* to the correlated metaphorical expressions to which they are paraphrasitically related.

Or consider another useful way to characterize the breakdown:

[4] (a) paraphrasis via synonymous expressions is *synthetically* related to the literal expressions to which they are synonymous, while (b) paraphrasis via prior values, ranges, or past lexical meanings is *analytically* related to the metaphorical expressions of which they are paraphrases.

Unlike with literal expressions, metaphorical expressions carry their prior definitions and imagery internally, enabling present metaphorical meaning to "piggy-back" or draw on their intrinsic prior semantic values (as opposed to "literal" expressions which store their meanings externally in dictionaries, lexicons, and various literary depositories). This piggy-backing, to reflect Catherine Lord's notion of "metaphor as parasitic on resemblances,"⁵ is an intrinsic characteristic of metaphors, and it is the grounds for the relevance of paraphrasis to metaphors and how metaphors work.

Now both the major and the minor correlations, or structural analogues, between (a) literal expressions in terms of synonyms, and (b) metaphorical expressions in terms of prior semantic values, may be more thoroughly examined by means of their applications to particular cases. First, I apply the above propositions or formulations to metaphors within the standard literature, and then I apply them to some more fanciful, less common metaphorical expressions.

⁵ Catherine Lord suggests that metaphors are "parasitic on resemblances." In a similar sense, I am suggesting that metaphorical meaning piggy-backs or draws on prior lexical meaning, content or experience. Please note, unless otherwise cited, references to Catherine Lord are drawn from her seminar on metaphor in the Spring of 1986, at Syracuse University.

Piggy-backing is an expression similarly used in educational contexts, both in teaching children how to make good metaphors, and in reference to creative problem solving—specifically in a particular stage of the group learning process called "brain-storming." Scott Isaksen and Donald Treffinger (*Creative Problem Solving: The Basic Course*, Bearly Limited, 1985, Two-7) introduce an analogous expression, "hitch-hiking," in reference to making divergent-thinking connections between loosely related ideas. See also, *The Gifted Kids Guide to Creative Thinking* (Charles Wetherall, Minneapolis, 1984).

1. Consider the phrase "Richard is a fox." Something like Paul Henle's "clash"⁶ or John Searle's first stage of "defectiveness"⁷ flags the expression as metaphorical (possibly this one point finds the most agreement within the literature). Now what part does paraphrasis play in this case? (a) One view is that paraphrasis simply does away with the metaphor, the "throw-away view."

(b) A second and anti-paraphrasis view holds that any paraphrasis at all is not only inadequate, but wholly unrelated to the metaphor in terms of doing away with it or standing proxy for its meaning. Similarly, as in Timothy Binkley's analysis, paraphrasis is related to a metaphorical expression precisely as it is related to any non-metaphorical or literal expression.⁸ In other words, one might claim "Richard is a fox" just means "Richard is cunning": but the second descriptive expression is no more than a synonym for the first, not a translation or a replacement of it. Each expression stands on its own (semantic autonomy). And this phenomenon is identical with the same sort of phenomenon in literal expressions: e.g., "Richard is an historical character" and the synonymous expression "Richard lived three to four hundred years ago"; or "Candice killed the rattler" and the synonymous expression "Candice blew the rattler to pieces with her 12-gauge side-by-side."

An intermediate view holds that metaphor paraphrasis is important for understanding the mechanism of the metaphorical expression, to getting at its meaning, but is wholly inadequate for exhaustively "translating" or superseding the metaphor—sometimes denoted a "promissory-note view," or metaphor inexhaustibility, or the inability for full metaphor excavation.

Unlike the second anti-paraphrasis view, in this third view the paraphrase of "Richard is a fox" is not exhaustively construable in terms of synonyms, as is the case with non-metaphorical expressions. Note, the literal statement "Richard lived three to four hundred years ago" is separate from or extrinsic to (though synonymous with) the expression "Richard is an historical character." "Richard is cunning," on the other hand, is not just an extrinsic synonym for the metaphor "Richard is a fox," but rather "Richard is cunning" has a distinct intrinsic semantic relation to the metaphorical expression. That is, "cunning" is a prior definition or semantic value of the metaphorical term, "fox." This intermediate view, construed especially in terms of [1] and [2] above, also plays out in some other cases of metaphor.

2. Consider the metaphor from Virginia Woolf, "An obliging thrush hopped across the lawn; a coil of pinkish rubber twisted in its beak." What sorts of lexical and locutionary past, what kinds of prior images, are brought into the metaphorical expression here that are intrinsic to the metaphorical focus, "a coil of pinkish rubber"? For only moderately mature language speakers the answer seems readily available: we have "the color pink," "the texture and characteristics of rubber," "the shape of a coil"; we have past literary, referential and locutionary usages (and images) such as "the pinkish skin of rats' tails," "rubber hoses or toys," "coils of rope" or "a coiled snake"; we have commonly habituated sensory responses such as slight "disgust," "repulsiveness," or the

⁶ As Paul Henle puts it, with metaphors, "whether taking all terms in their literal sense produces an absurdity or merely something incongruous, the clash of literal meanings must be felt. If it is not, one of two situations must obtain—either the passage is taken literally without encountering any difficulty and no suspicion of a metaphor arises, or else the figurative meaning is so usual that the reader goes to it immediately. In this case one has an idiom or a 'dead metaphor' which, properly, is no metaphor at all" (Paul Henle, "Metaphor," in Johnson, 92).

⁷ Searle: "First there must be some shared strategies on the basis of which the hearer can recognize that the [metaphorical] utterance is not intended literally. The most common, but not the only strategy, is based on the fact that the utterance is obviously defective if taken literally" (Searle, 281).

⁸ Timothy Binkley, "On the Truth and Probity of Metaphor" (Johnson, 136-53).

often unpleasant tactile "feel of soft rubber or latex." (Of course, as with any sentence, both immediate and general contexts will further illumine meaning.)

All this lexical and locutionary background and prior usage and vivid imagery involved in the focus of Woolf's metaphor are semantically intrinsic to it, and make up what has commonly and mistakenly been referred to as its literal paraphrase. The complexity, the density or "promise of more," the follow-through involved in a metaphor, the packed storehouse of sensory images and common allusions both literary and cultural-experiential, are reflected in all the past lexical, semantic activity built into the focus of the metaphor.

Consequently, a good metaphor is a function of two major factors. One is the metaphor's quantitative complexity—to borrow from Nelson Goodman's terminology, the more labels transferred to the new realm the better the metaphor. The second factor is the metaphor's qualitative complexity—the qualitative selection of prior semantic values, or the more appropriate and relevant the intrinsic prior semantic values and images, the better the metaphor. A badly constructed metaphor will entail blatantly misleading or confusing intrinsic prior semantic values. Thus, the work of "restricting the prior values of R" (as Searle's puts it⁹), and the possibility of such work, is as much the job and the challenge of the interpreter as it is a reflection of the skill of *the metaphor-maker* in weaving a good and intelligible metaphor. Though many metaphors are fairly time-bound and culture-relative, inevitably some metaphors, in drawing on broader, more general human and literary experiences, turn out to be gloriously transcultural and timeless, accessible to humankind regardless of age, dialect, or traditions.

Paraphrasis, therefore, does not in any way replace or supplant a metaphor. Rather such paraphrastic semantic material is utterly intrinsic to the metaphorical expression itself, it travels with the expression not unlike an alter ego, or maybe a literary version of the "collective unconscious."

3. Consider the following metaphors whose prior semantic values entail highly restricted temporal and cultural allusions:

The yearling auction transforms Keeneland Race Course...into a glittering Disney World of possibilities.¹⁰

The Oscar-winning movie *Out of Africa* is helping turn Kenya into "an enormous Disneyland, a big fake," writes Carlo Rossella in the news magazine *Panorama of Milan* [Mar. 2].¹¹

⁹ Searle writes, "Confining ourselves to the simplest subject-predicate cases, we can say that the general form of the metaphorical utterance is that a speaker utters a sentence of the form 'S is P' and means metaphorically that S is R [where S is a subject, P is a literal predicate, R is a corresponding metaphorical term]" (Searle, 255). He then summarizes the main problem: "How is it possible for the speaker to say metaphorically 'S is P' and mean 'S is R', when P plainly does not mean R? Furthermore, How is it possible for the hearer who hears the utterance 'S is P' to know that the speaker means 'S is R'?" For Searle, in understanding metaphors a hearer must go through at least three sets of steps: "First, he must have some strategy for determining whether or not he has to seek a metaphorical interpretation of the utterance in the first place [see note 7]. Second, when he has decided to look for a metaphorical interpretation, he must have some set of strategies or principles for computing possible values of R, and third, he must have a set of strategies or principles for restricting the range of Rs—for deciding which Rs are likely to be the ones the speaker is asserting of S" (Searle, 273-4).

¹⁰ *Smithsonian*, April 1986, 118.

¹¹ *World Press Review*, May 1986, 8.

Notice, in the second metaphor, that the qualifying clause "a big fake" is part of the broader context, and greatly restricts or narrows the range of possible values for the metaphorical focus. "A big fake" doesn't actually refer to any of the metaphor's standard prior semantic values, but refers solely to or modifies the present (intrinsic) meaning of the metaphorical expression. Yet, "a big fake" is not itself intrinsic to the metaphor, nor does it function as a part of the intrinsic semantic nature of the metaphor. Rather, given the actual present, truth-functional meaning of the metaphorical expression, "a big fake" may be seen as a distinct, extrinsic, synthetic parallel expression, a synonymous expression which to some degree actually modifies or restricts the range of the metaphorical expression itself. (By 'synthetic parallelism' I mean that, instead of simply restating the metaphorical expression, the modifier "a big fake" also adds to and restricts the semantic content of the specific metaphorical expression.)

This example shows how one may construct one expression, either in a metaphorical or a literal mode of language, that stands as a synonym or a modifier to another metaphorical expression. As is the case with synonyms of literal expressions, the synonym of a metaphorical expression is wholly and semantically extrinsic, though adjectivally relevant, to that metaphorical expression. Because of this linguistic fact, one can see just how metaphors can be truth-functionally equal with "literal" statements, i.e., capable of being straight-forwardly true or false. For if an expression is capable of being true or false, it is equally capable of having a truth-functionally synonymous expression stand in a synonymous or adjectival relation to it.

II.

In what way then does metaphor truth-value relate to literal truth-value? It follows from the above analysis, that there is a definite link between metaphor meaning and truth-value. If metaphor meaning, and the paraphrastic background or activity intermediate to such meaning, is intrinsic to metaphorical expressions, then it also follows that:

[5] truth-value is to any metaphorical (figurative) expression *as* truth-value is to any non-metaphorical (literal) expressions.

I am relying here upon what is commonly understood about the truth-value of literal expressions (within the standard philosophic literature) for my construal of metaphor truth-value, since I am drawing a straightforward identity relation in [5] by means of the connective '*as*'. It goes without saying that the identity relation in [5] stands in calculated contrast to the non-identity (or analogical) relations laid out in [1] and [2].

In certain significant ways, the thesis in [5] is a restatement of Binkley's position concerning metaphor truth-value. However, because thesis [5] is grounded on [1] through [4], and in this sense is contrary to Binkley's own position—at least to the extent that his is wholly anti-paraphrastic, not only in terms of "what metaphors mean" but also in terms of "how they work"—it will help to state briefly the relevant aspects of Binkley's analysis of metaphor truth-value.

Binkley writes, "a person using (1) ["Richard is a fox"] as a metaphor is not propounding... a false proposition. He does not *mean* the literal sense...[of (1)], although he could not mean what he does without it."¹² That is, even if a "literal rendering" of a particular metaphorical expression or statement is false, that has no bearing whatsoever upon the actual metaphor itself. Being a weaker version of [1] through [4] above, Binkley holds that "translating the metaphorical into the

¹² Binkley, 139.

literal may be an aid to understanding, but it is not the formula for saying more accurately what one wants to say, what one means."¹³

Similar to Binkley, I hold that metaphors are precisely not "category mistakes," but are simply either true or false, just as is the case with literal expressions. That a metaphor is not a category mistake can be seen by noting, e.g., that "Richard is a fox" is utterly unrelated to the obviously bizarre literal expression "Richard is a small, furry animal."

Now "literal truth is not a kind of truth, but a truth expressed in literal language"¹⁴—likewise with metaphorical truth. In other words, a metaphorical claim or expression is truth-functionally no different from a literal claim or expression, except that the metaphorical claim is formulated out of metaphorical or figurative language, even as a literal claim is nothing other than a claim made with literal language. There is only one kind of truth, no matter how it is linguistically formulated, no matter what linguistic mechanisms are utilized in its expression (whether literal, metaphorical, or other figurative modes are employed). When considered in terms of speech acts, metaphorical expressions may accomplish the same as literal expressions, in, e.g., questioning, stating, promising, commanding, or reporting.

There is one difference between Binkley and myself, however. That is, following Jonathan Cohen,¹⁵ I construe metaphor truth-value more strictly in terms of sentence meaning (as considered above in section I) while Binkley construes metaphor truth-value solely in terms of speaker meaning. It is on this point, it would seem, that Binkley and I part company.¹⁶

III.

Given the previous analysis, it becomes possible to locate the distinct elements of the cognitive content or the core proposition expressed in the metaphor, and the imagery content of the metaphor. First, the cognitive content or core proposition is the essential claim or truth-functional, semantic element in the metaphorical expression, just as it is in any non-metaphorical or literal expression. Second, the imagery content is the "metaphorical density" which involves vividness, presence, and complexity—"putting things before the eyes." Such imagery content is a function of the past lexical, locutionary and common background intrinsic to the metaphor.

The truth-functional meaning of the metaphorical expression just is the present semantic content of that expression. The way of arriving at the truth-functional meaning, the way the metaphor works, is, on the other hand, grounded in the prior imagery and semantic content of the

¹³ Binkley, 146; italics mine

¹⁴ Binkley, 151

¹⁵ As Jonathan Cohen explains, note that "the metaphoricalness, or special character, of (8) ["The boy next door is a ball of fire"] is preserved under transformation into indirect discourse: The apology-making character of (6) ["I am sorry"] is not. Why is this? The simplest explanation seems to be that metaphoricalness is a property of sentences. Those, like Searle, who wish to reject such an explanation bear the onus of presenting a convincing alternative one. Otherwise their theory limps" (Jonathan Cohan, "Semantics of Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, Andrew Ortony, ed., Cambridge, 1982, 65-6). (See also note 27 below.)

¹⁶ Binkley and I differ on this point, unless, by his use of "speaker meaning," he is doing what Alston does in "Irreducible Metaphors." As Alston puts it, "A language serves as a means of communication; that is its basic *raison d'etre*. Speech is the use of language in communication (using speech in an extended sense to cover written as well as oral communication). It is what we do in the course of exploiting a linguistic system for the purposes of communication." Thus metaphor, in Alston's view, "stands for a certain way of using words, a mode of speech rather than a type of meaning or any other feature of language" (William Alston, "Irreducible Metaphors in Theology," in *Experience, Reason and God*, Eugene Long, ed., Washington, D.C., 1980, 131-32).

metaphor, as per [2] (b) above—i.e., the prior values, the ranges before transference of labels, the past lexical or common definitions and uses of the metaphorical terms.

The act of seeing resemblances and similarities functions as a criterion for drawing upon the background imagery which goes into the construction of a good metaphor: consider Aristotle's notion of "seeing resemblances," the unteachable aspect of the art of metaphor-making,¹⁷ or Kant's idea of "schematism" involved in getting the image for the concept.¹⁸

Metaphors, therefore, are far more than ornamental appendages to non-figurative language. They are much more than non-cognitive, emotive expressions. And they are no more subject to ambiguity, vagueness, lack of clarity, or confusion than are their non-metaphorical counterparts (a point emphasized both by Binkley and Searle).

Ambiguity and vagueness, on the one hand, and clarity, precision, or hearer accessibility to meaning, on the other, are all functions of metaphors in generally the same way as they are of literal statements. Actually, the fact that metaphors are "parasitic on resemblances"—that to work they must utilize prior semantic values—gives them an edge or potential advantage over literal expressions in precision, clarity, and especially hearer accessibility to propositional or cognitive content! For metaphors often supply more useful common background to the hearer than do literal expressions which rely solely upon strict conceptual and straightforward, extrinsic, lexical and connotative content, without the additional information or imagery generated in metaphorical expressions (cf. Kant's distinction between concept and image¹⁹). Metaphorical expressions accomplish this imaging precisely because they do carry their prior definitions, ranges, and so forth, internally with them into propositional and public communicative discourse.

In this way, metaphors can be said to have two distinct semantic systems rather than one: a "*dual-system-semantics*," made up of the prior semantic values on the one hand (imagery content), and the present semantic values on the other (conceptual content, core propositions). The primary cognitive or conceptual content, the core proposition of a metaphorical expression, is the truth-functional aspect of that expression (even as in literal expressions). Two sorts of examples bear out this truth-functional nature of metaphors. One comes from everyday language and general literature; the second comes from idiomatic, technical, or code-type languages (often labeled technical jargon).

¹⁷ Can this "metaphor-making" be construed as *poesis* in the classical sense? Cf. discussion in Susan Langer's *Feeling and Form*, New York, 1953, 266. On Aristotle's notion of metaphor and "seeing resemblances," see his *Poetics*, chap. 19-23 (1456a-1459b), and *Rhetoric*, Book III, chap. 10-11 (1410b-1413b).

¹⁸ Kant's notion of "schematism" refers to a way of paying attention to something, perceptually, or a way of reflecting on something, a way of construing an image into concreteness. See Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, sect. 8+9 of Book I, "Analytic of the Beautiful," and sect. 49 of Book II, "Analytic of the Sublime" (J. H. Bernard, trans., New York, 1951, 48-54, and 156-63).

¹⁹ Concerning Kant's distinction between concept and image, see references in note 19 above. Specifically, this distinction relates to his correlative distinction between an "aesthetic idea" and a "rational idea," i.e., referring to the animating principle in the mind of the faculty of presenting aesthetic ideas, and by an "aesthetic idea" Kant means the counterpart of a "rational idea" which is a concept to which no intuition or "representation of the imagination" is adequate. That is, an aesthetic idea is that representation of the imagination which induces much though indefinite thought, being without any concept, and which language can never state quite intelligibly (see sect. 49 of the "Analytic of the Sublime," *Critique of Judgment*, in Bernard).

1. Consider the metaphor in Milton's poem "On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough":²⁰

O fairest flower, no sooner blown but blasted,
Soft silken primrose fading timelessly.

Certainly one can think up many ways of saying or paraphrasing these lines—such is the recursive nature of language. However, though these two brief lines may be expressed in other sentential forms, whether figurative or literal, this in no way detracts from their quality or content. Actually, non-figurative expressions have a way of forfeiting compactness when used to paraphrase well-constructed figurative expressions. And in these two lines Milton paints with truly great compactness and precision not merely the proclamation of a child's death, but also the pervasive atmosphere of human emotions, the complexity of deep psychological resonance surrounding the death of this infant. Here, and in the rest of the poem, Milton describes a whole chapter of mortal experience, fully common on the one hand, though never common-place on the other. By means of carefully employing an array of images and past semantic values, Milton generates and concretizes his poem's moods, stage settings, lighting and direction, to enhance the portraiture of this sorrowful, yet by no means meaningless, event. In these lines there is not only the greatest depth and complexity, yet there is also a marvolous clarity, precision, brevity of words, and accessibility of meaning for the reader.

Take the following common metaphor, quite dead, yet still evoking its metaphorical origins, and, to some degree, its dual-system-semantics:

The secondary reduction gear on a C-9 transmission has 82 teeth.

No doubt gears do not possess teeth in the literal or anatomical sense, as I or my cat possess a mouth-full of teeth. But gears do have rounded metal extensions or knobs around their parameters which, at some past time, were picturesquely baptized "teeth."²¹ This metaphor is certainly dead, yet the image, as common and tired as it is now, still seems to draw on the past semantic values intrinsic to the expression. A dead metaphor which retains even some imagery has not yet evolved into a purely literal expression, as is the case, e.g., with the expression "the hood of a car." It is surely the metaphorical structure and its semantic background, the dual-system-semantics (with both core proposition and imagery²²), which makes communicating the idea of these "rounded gear appendages" so much easier in terms of referring to them by the word "teeth," rather than having to continually refer to them by means of more complex and cumbersome non-figurative definite descriptions. On the issue of dead or clichè metaphors, let me simply note at this point, that dead

²⁰ *The Works of Milton*, London, 1924, 480.

²¹ Did not many hapless laborers literally succumb to such "teeth"? Recall the vivid picture of the great industrial age machines—so well visualized in the 1926 German film *Metropolis* (by Fritz Lang)—chewing up and spitting out the dehumanized working class; one mammoth machine is actually seen to become the god Molach consuming laborers sacrificed to it by the ruling elite.

²² I am taking it here that metaphorical imagery is a function of prior semantic values and ranges; this is quite distinct from some imagistic poetry—as, e.g., William Carlos Williams's lines "The trees/ the tulip's bright tips/ sidle and toss"—wherein the imagery is purely a function of present, literal semantic values or lexical content, without the help of prior semantic values.

metaphors seem to retain at least a minimum of imagery not readily available in "strictly literal" linguistic expressions.²³

2. Note the following technical, nautical metaphors. Now a technical or code-language metaphor is similar to a dead metaphor except that fewer numbers of people tend to relate to it as dead (generally only those within or privy to that particular idiomatic or dialectic group):

There's a vessel under goose-winged topsails off the port quarter. [i.e. the bunt of a close-reefed topsail]
Growlers can be a real hazard in glacial waters, especially during the spring.
[i.e. small yet dangerous chunks of glacial ice]

Two points may be made here. First of all, even to an "old salt" or "deckie," marvelous images and vivid density are involved in such expressions as these. Now the sailor not only knows precisely what is meant (cognitive content, core propositions), but nonetheless, can still enjoy the called up imagery drawing or piggy-backing on the prior semantic values, meanings, or imagery content.

Second, the imagery in these purportedly dead metaphorical expressions can certainly give, and often does give, the newcomer to life at sea a help or aid toward understanding their meaning. And such aid is simply not available in non-metaphorical, literal expressions. That is, a literal technical term, lacking any metaphorical features—lacking a dual-system-semantics—does not have the vivid hints or leads to aid the uninitiated: note, e.g., the clearly non-metaphorical term "binnacle" (a non-magnetic container for a ship's compass), or "clinometer" (a device for measuring the list or sideways rolling of a ship, also called, and a bit more helpfully so, an "inclinometer").

Undoubtedly, it would appear, dead metaphors are a matter of degree, and the above considerations seem to bear out this fact. Yet, the less literal or more figurative a once-dead metaphor becomes—the more revitalized or resuscitated it becomes—the more that metaphor retains or exhibits its dual-system-semantics and the more accessible, potentially precise and clear, such metaphorical or quasi-metaphorical (dead or clichè) expressions will be.

Metaphor-making is, for accomplished language speakers, a spontaneous skill, sometimes haphazard, sometimes indicative of impeccable insight, linguistic artistry, 'poetic intuition'²⁴ and 'genius'.²⁵ Generally, rather than metaphors misleading one, metaphors can exhibit the highest cognitive levels of illocutionary accomplishments in the communicative arts, in schematically weaving concept and image (Kant), in navigating the narrows from resemblances to precise, articulate metaphorical expression.

²³ Note that the term "dead" in the expression "dead metaphor" is itself a metaphorical term partaking of that very characteristic which it itself is denoting; and when one thinks about it, though "dead metaphor" is itself mostly a dead metaphor, it still draws on or intrinsically carries with it many of the prior semantic values and images of the literal term "dead." Consider, e.g., that dead metaphors are a result of living metaphors loosing their capacity for calling up images and vivid impressions before the mind's eye: like a dead cat loosing its capacity for bounding about the living room.

²⁴ For a discussion of Jacques Maritain's notion of "poetic intuition" see his *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York, 1974), especially chapter IV, 75-108; see also *The Range of Reason* (New York, 1953), 25-26; for a good secondary source discussion, see John W. Hanke's *Maritain's Ontology of the Work of Art*, The Hague Netherlands, 1973, chapter IV, 68-99.

²⁵ On Aristotle's notion of "genius" and the art of metaphor-making see his *Poetics*, 1459a5-10.

As regards "metaphorical speech acts," to put it simply, I believe there are no such things.²⁶ Rather, as with nonfigurative expressions, metaphors are "basic linguistic mechanisms" utilized in written or oral communication, such that speech acts of all kinds may be framed or couched in a metaphorical form or mode, even as they may likewise be framed in a "literal" mode. When I use the term "metaphorical speech acts," then, I merely mean speech acts cast in a metaphorical mode of linguistic expression as opposed to speech acts cast in a literal mode of expression—I do not mean to imply the existence of a distinct type or class of speech act.

Therefore, what is applicable to sentential (written) metaphorical expressions, is likewise applicable to various kinds of speech acts formulated in a metaphorical mode, for in terms of language usage, sentential metaphorical expressions and metaphorical-mode speech acts are functionally the same. And, this conclusion does not conflate in any way the important distinction between language and speech. Language is that abstract system which entails both internal syntactic elements and external semantic elements, whereas speech is the use of language in communication (written or oral). Thus, metaphor "stands for a certain way of using words, a mode of speech rather than a type of meaning or any other feature of language."²⁷

Metaphorical dual-system-semantic linguistic mechanisms are neither speech acts nor special kinds of meaning, they're just simple and unadulterated, straightforward, truth-functional, expressive-communicative meaning-vehicles. A little lower than the angels, perhaps, a little less direct than their non-figurative younger brothers, metaphors are unassuming, unapologetic, lexical hitch-hikers, imagery troubadours, literary-allusive gypsies, semantic piggy-backing linguistic nomads.

²⁶ Cohen similarly claims, "metaphor cannot be explained within a theory of speech acts, because a supposed speech act of metaphorizing would differ from standard types of speech act in an important respect": non-metaphorical speech acts can be overridden by passage from *oratio recta* to *oratio obliqua*, while metaphors behave quite differently. He adds, "the metaphor is not overridden by the passage from *oratio recta* to *oratio obliqua*: the *oratio obliqua* sentence ["Tom said the Boy next door is a ball of fire"] contains the same element of metaphorical meaning that the *oratio recta* ["The boy next door is a ball of fire"] contained. Arguable, therefore, metaphorical meaning inheres in sentences, not just in speech acts. We should be perfectly happy to say here, 'What Tom said is true,' not just, 'What Tom meant is true'" (Cohen, 65).

²⁷ Alston, 132.

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