

METAPHOR AND THOUGHT

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One of the central problems in philosophy of language is discovering the relation of language to thought. It has been said that language makes our thought accessible to ourselves and others. For instance, Frege argued that signs are necessary for fixing our fleeting impressions and "without signs we would hardly rise to conceptual thinking."¹ The operation of fixing thoughts by signs, however, can be thought of as metaphorical. According to this metaphor, thought is unstable and has a tendency to escape, while the sign is some kind of physical tether which can curb these tendencies. This could mean that any statement, however literal it may seem, functions only because of this underlying operation of fixing thought with words which is metaphorical. It could also be argued, however, that using a sign to fix a thought is a literal operation and that speaking of "fixing" the thought with the sign is a dispensable metaphor. Derrida challenges those who think this and asks how we can imagine what it is that we do when we use signs to "fix" thought without resorting to some kind of metaphor.

While it is widely accepted that metaphor is a common feature of natural language, its relation to language and thought is disputed. There are those who believe metaphor is foundational to all linguistic transaction. Derrida, for one, believes that language only works because of the basic mechanism of metaphor: roughly, every time we exchange a word for a concept we are operating metaphorically. A word is not of the same order as the concept that the word represents, and when the word "transfers" us to the concept with which it is associated, this may be understood as a metaphorical transfer. From this point of view, the phenomenon of metaphor is essential to language and therefore to thought because even literal statements rely on this metaphorical operation.

There are those who believe metaphor is not foundational. According to Frege's and Davidson's view, for instance, metaphors are

the inessential bows and ribbons. From their perspective, it is possible to make literal utterances that are free of metaphorical contamination and that are not dependent on a covert metaphorical mechanism. On this view, it is possible for all metaphors to be restated in literal terms. Davidson also believes metaphors have no cognitive content, and this would seem to mean that metaphor cannot represent a thought in the same way that a literal statement can. Because of the idea that metaphor has no cognitive content, we can conclude that from Davidson's point of view, metaphor is not fundamental either to representing thought or to language. If one thinks, however, as Derrida does, that language is based on a pervasive metaphorical operation—the basic exchange of a word for a concept—one can conclude that metaphor is a mode of thought and is indispensable to language.

It is thus possible to think of metaphor in at least two ways. What we will call the "foundational approach" takes metaphor as the basis for language and what we will call the "containment approach" gives metaphor a small place in a theory of meaning for a language. Those who take the containment approach seem to be system builders, while those who take the foundational approach seem not to have systematic reasons for doing so. This is significant, and although it may incidentally say something about the interests of the different theorists, that there can be such an opposition about the same phenomenon seems to indicate something about the nature of metaphor as well. We will see that those who favor the foundational approach for metaphor do not, or maybe cannot, give systematic reasons for giving it this role and as we will show, those advocates of a limited role for metaphor have difficulties, in certain instances, with imposing limitations on metaphor.

The project of discovering the relationship of metaphor to thought would be much easier if one did not have to try to define thought or cognitive content. In a sense, though, by arguing

that metaphors can or cannot be representative of thought, one is attempting to determine what a thought is or can be. Since it is difficult to actually determine what is meant by the phrase "cognitive content," it is equally difficult to know, when Davidson argues that metaphors do not have cognitive content, whether this is the same as saying that they cannot represent thoughts. I take these terms "thought" and "cognitive content" to be approximately interchangeable. When Davidson says that metaphors have no cognitive content, this would seem to mean that metaphors do not convey thoughts. This basic idea is supported by Davidson's other statements about metaphors. It would seem that if metaphors have an "effect" this is not to be equated with an actual thought and that roughly speaking, metaphorical expressions are inferior to straightforward literal expressions for representing thought. It is fairly safe to conclude that as a type of linguistic phenomenon, metaphor is considered, from Davidson's point of view, to be inferior to literal utterances as a carrier for thought. I will argue, however, contra Davidson that metaphors do have cognitive content and are able to represent a kind of thought.

A central and difficult problem when trying to determine whether metaphor can be a carrier of thought is trying to understand the nature of metaphor. There are many entrenched confusions about this. When looking at the variety of theories about metaphor, it is hard not to think of the parable of the blind men who describe various parts of the elephant: none of them are incorrect, but none of them have the complete picture either. One gets a sense that metaphor has many facets, only some of which are addressed by any one theory. In trying to determine what precisely a metaphor is, or what metaphors can do, there are as many problems as there are in determining the same thing about literal statements. Just as there are arguments about how a thought may be composed of words used in a literal sense, so there are many arguments about what linguistic units a metaphor can be composed of. Whether or not metaphors can go on to represent thought is a question that must be dealt with in addition to these basic questions. Part of the resilience and perpetual interest of metaphor must be due to

the fact that metaphor has all of the "ordinary" problems and then some.

Theories of metaphor attempt to address the question of what the relation of metaphor to meaning is. If one understands meaning purely in literal terms, providing one does not think of this as a fiction, is there a role for metaphor to play with respect to meaning? Although standard pictures of meaning have been developed—there are the Fregean/Davidsonian and the Saussurian accounts for instance—one may think as Derrida does, that any theory of language, or how one understands meaning, is somehow dependent on metaphor. Not surprisingly, there is a suspicion that certain metaphors may be foundational to theories of meaning for a language as well.

With Frege's and Davidson's systematic views of how language works, these theories attempt to give a description of literal language and at the same time, probably not coincidentally, they attempt to contain metaphor. If language represents thought and makes thought accessible to us, then studying how thought is fixed by language involves formulating a theory of meaning for a language. The modern debate about metaphor often gravitates to the question of whether or not metaphor has its own meaning distinct from literal meaning. This is really a debate about what role metaphor plays in language and whether it reflects thought in a way comparable to the way in which literal expression does. It is a debate about how to construe a theory of meaning for a language and consequently how we view metaphor. When we see that theories of meaning for languages can be thought of as pictures of how we represent thought through language, it is also possible to see that there is a connection between metaphors, which are often compared to pictures, and theories of meaning. This is one of the main points that Derrida presents in his critique of Aristotle. The most concise statement of his idea is "philosophy, as a theory of metaphor, first will have been a metaphor of theory."² Or, adapted for our purpose: when we make a theory about metaphor, we need a theory of meaning as our framework, but, according to Derrida, the theory of meaning is itself already based on metaphors. Derrida's most challenging idea here is that it is impossible to escape from metaphor.

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

Even when we think we are dealing with a straightforward literal statement, we find that the word used in what we think is a literal way actually transports us to the concept represented by the word. Derrida points out that this mechanism of transportation from word to concept is already metaphorical. An immediate response would be to deny that this "transportation" from a word used literally in a literal sentence to the concept normally associated with this word is a metaphorical operation. We will see, however, that it is an idea that is perhaps not so easily refuted. Metaphor is not easily kept within the place allocated in theories of meaning that favor the simple independence of the literal as we shall see. This alone does not mean that Derrida is right and that no literal statement can be made without reliance on a covert metaphorical operation. It may only mean, for instance, that the theories of meaning of the containment strategists are not complex enough to contain metaphor adequately.

First we will look at the containment approach and how it is that metaphor escapes the place it is offered. We will start with examining how metaphor may fit into Frege's theory of meaning for a language and in this, I shall rely mainly on Michael Dummett's interpretation of Frege.

Frege's Theory of Meaning

Dummett believed that Frege, in giving a theory of how a language works, also gives an account of a theory of meaning: "for to know how an expression functions, taken as part of the language, is just to know its meaning."³ In describing how an expression functions, Frege makes his famous distinction between sense and reference. Dummett tells us that sense is part of an intuitive notion of meaning, while reference is not. We can roughly think of sense as being internal to language and reference as external to it. Dummett uses the terms sense, tone, and force and in this section, I will consider whether metaphor can be explained in terms of reference, sense, tone, or force.

Reference

In Frege's terms, reference can be known through a formula of the language of predicate logic. "An interpretation of such a formula . . .

is obtained by assigning entities of suitable kinds to the primitive non-logical constants occurring in the formulas."⁴ Frege's theory identifies terms, atomic sentences, and complex sentences. A term has "some object as its denotation." "An atomic sentence [is] formed by attaching a one-place predicate to a term and this is stipulated as true, under the interpretation, if the object denoted by the term has the property assigned by the interpretation to the predicate, false if it lacks the property."⁵ "Complex sentences formed by means of sentential operators [such as 'and,' 'or,' 'if . . . then,' etc.] and quantifiers ['all,' 'every'] are then assigned truth-values by means of the usual inductive stipulation, starting with the assignment of truth-values to the atomic sentences as a base."⁶

The truth-values of atomic sentences are "determined, together with an account of the way in which the truth-value of a complex sentence is determined, given the truth-values of its constituents."⁷ Dummett explains that for "the purposes of logic, we do not need to know what truth is, or how truth is related to meaning" and even though truth and its relation to meaning may be vague, "we know that an inference is valid if we have a guarantee that its conclusion is true, provided that its premises are."⁸ He points out that this procedure is "exactly the same as the modern semantic treatment of the language of predicate logic"⁹ save for a few qualifications that we will not go into here. It is "such a notion of 'interpretation' as applied to sentences constructed after the pattern of Frege's symbolic language . . . that provides us with an account of the truth-conditions of the sentences of the language" and that enables the logician "to frame the conceptions of soundness and completeness for a given set of formal rules of deduction." It is this notion of interpretation that Frege is thinking of when he speaks of reference.¹⁰ In addition, Frege makes a distinction between being able to refer to an object and referring to concepts or properties.

More simply, reference, for our purposes, involves picking out parts of the physical world using words. Dummett says, "the possession of reference by a word or expression consists in an association between it and something in the world."¹¹ To say, however, that reference is not an ingredient in meaning is "to

METAPHOR AND THOUGHT

claim that our understanding a word or expression never consists . . . merely in our associating something in the world with that word or expression.”¹²

Before we leave reference, we will review Frege’s famous problem and its connection with metaphor. Some theorists associate metaphor with the Fregean puzzle about the informativeness of an identity statement. In metaphor, we know (somehow) that a single referent is involved and yet because we have one literal name and an additional metaphorical name, for the same thing, it is possible to learn something about the referent. If we take a simple example from Shakespeare: “those tears are pearl which thy love sheds” (Sonnet XXXIV) we can see that with this metaphor: “tears are pearl,” the word “pearl” is applied not to what it usually is applied to, but rather it is applied, metaphorically, to tears. We can ask how we learn something new through giving the same referent two different names, one of which in this case is literal “tears” and one of which is metaphorical “pearl?” We learn that in some cases, tears can be valued as pearls are. If we can equate the possibility of learning something new with possessing cognitive value, we can see that there is some similarity between Frege’s problem of the informativeness of an identity statement and Aristotle’s idea of metaphor. In Aristotle’s view, language may suffer gaps and when such a gap is filled for the first time, the result is a metaphor from which we have learned something new. From the Fregean perspective, we can think of some types of metaphor as introducing the problem of how we say something informative when we speak of the same referent using two different names.

Sense

If reference is all that is needed to determine the truth-value of a sentence and sense also is taken to be just that which is needed to determine the truth-value of a sentence, what special role does sense play? Dummett says that it appears “that the sense of an expression must coincide with its reference, or at least, that there must be a one-one correspondence between senses and references.”¹³ Contrary to expectation, however, “Frege held that many

senses could correspond to the same reference.”¹⁴ Dummett, in answering how this can be, points out that “reference is not an ingredient of meaning.” If it were, then the “reference of a word would exhaust . . . its sense,” but obviously reference is not a part of meaning, or language in general, and so “sense can still be explained as constituting that part of the meaning of a word or expression which needs to be grasped in order to decide the truth-values of the sentences containing it.” Dummett thus can say that “any feature of the meaning of a word which does not affect the reference that it has, does not belong to its sense: it in no way follows that two words with the same reference, must have the same sense.”¹⁵ “The sense of the word . . . consists in some means by which a reference of an appropriate kind is determined for that word.”¹⁶ Grasping the sense of a word does not consist only in finding the right referent to be associated with it, but rather sense is the “*means* by which this association is effected,” and when one has this knowledge, one has a grasp of sense.

Applying the sense and reference distinction to our simple metaphorical example, we want the sense of the word “tears” when we use it literally to take us to the right referent, that bodily fluid that comes from our eyes when we are sad. Likewise, we want the sense of the word “pearl” to take us to the right referent, those mollusoid concretions that English ladies like to wear with black. So, what is happening with the sense of the word “pearl” when the metaphor makes it clear that we should apply the word “pearl(s)” to tears and think of tears in terms of pearl(s)? Instead of using the sense of the word “pearl” to come to the usual referent, we are persuaded to take a detour. There is a tension between the literal objective of arriving at the right destination (or referent) by taking the right literal route (or sense) and the metaphorical objective of deliberately using the “wrong” route to arrive at the right destination, but learning something about the destination through having taken this “wrong” route.

We want the sense of words to be objective and something that everyone can understand—a route that everyone can take to the right destination—because this is what communication depends upon. To have this objec-

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

tivity threatened is to threaten the purpose of language. Metaphor persuades us to take detours. With our previous metaphor, we are riding along the pearl road, but we arrive at the destination of tears. In this way, metaphor would seem to be a diverting force that is as problematic for the straightforward account of sense and reference as a proper name like "Merlin" is. In the Merlin case, the question is, how do we arrive at the correct referent when the referent has disappeared into the mists of time and legend? With metaphor, the question is rather how do we arrive at the correct referent, if we are sometimes mystifying and playing about with the normal function of the sense of a word? How do we know when we shorten the pearl metaphor and say "pearls" in this metaphorical context, we really mean tears and the next time, when we say "pearls" we literally mean those coveted spheres of perfection?

This is one of the main questions to be answered about metaphor, putting it in Fregean terms: does clashing the senses of two distinct entities (tears and pearl) into one metaphor (pearltears) threaten the objectivity of either sense? Does it undermine our understanding of the sense used in a literal way? Some theorists, especially the containment theorists, say that to grant metaphor its own sense which is separate from the literal sense is to undermine language as a whole. Others assert that metaphor does have its own meaning and that to say so is not to threaten the purpose of language.

Tone

From a Fregean point of view it might seem most natural to expect metaphor to fall within the category of tone. Dummett describes the difference between sense and tone in this way: to "the sense of a word or expression belong only those features of its meaning which are relevant to the truth-value of some sentence in which it may occur: differences in meaning which are not so relevant are related to the tone of the word or expression."¹⁷ An example would be the difference between "dead" and "deceased"; this difference is a consideration of tone. The sense of the word is just that which helps us to determine the truth value of the sentence in which the word is found. Frege asserted this because he wanted to avoid having truth values of a sentence dependent upon

something as vague and subjective as mental images. Frege accounts "for tone as a matter of the association with a word or expression of certain 'ideas' . . . by which he means mental images."¹⁸ Dummett thinks this is not plausible because we cannot describe the difference in mental images called up by the words "dead" and "deceased." He argues that since "Frege was mistaken in supposing mental images to be incommunicable in principle," he is also mistaken in thinking that tone is subjective in principle.¹⁹ Dummett believes that "an individual may invest a word with a tone which it does not have for most speakers of the language; but, equally well, someone may attach a sense to a word different from the sense attached by others."²⁰ It is thus understandable why metaphors, which are often associated with mental images, might be considered a matter of tone and are thought of as being inherently subjective. This is not a necessary association however, particularly if one thinks that the constitutive words of metaphor have their usual literal senses and these senses are as objective and graspable, as Davidson will tell us.

But we can already ask: does metaphor fit here with considerations of tone? To what extent does metaphor depend on the ability of the constitutive words to "call up certain mental images?" One can further ask: can metaphor be considered under the heading of sense? The answer will depend on where one draws the line between sense and tone. Metaphor as we have seen could be described as a linguistic event that forces the sense of a word to take us to a different referent. This description, however, tampers with the very notion of a sense of a word as that which helps us to think of the correct (literal) referent. On the Fregean view, it seems that metaphor fits into the category of tone by default because it is not the case that the purpose of metaphor is to take us to the correct referent.

Force

Force describes the way in which sentences can be used for different ends such as commands, questions, and so on. It is possible to take a literal statement and turn it into a question or a command. It is also possible to take a literal statement and render it metaphorically. The literal statement "I am guilty of murder

METAPHOR AND THOUGHT

and nothing can change that" can be rendered metaphorically, and we can glean something like that literal statement from Lady MacBeth's self-accusation: "Here's the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (*MacBeth*, V, i). Being able to change the tenor of a literal sentence by casting it in metaphorical mode could cause one to believe that this operation is similar to the one where a literal sentence is changed to a question or command. Roger White, and others, however, point out that since commands can be given and questions asked using metaphor, perhaps metaphor cannot be considered in the category of force. For example: MacBeth asks of the Doctor attending Lady MacBeth: "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,/ Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,/ Raze out the written troubles of the brain?" (*MacBeth*, V, iii). When advised by the Doctor: "Therein the patient/ Must minister to himself," MacBeth (rhetorically) commands "Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it" (*MacBeth*, V, iii). These are all examples of commands and questions containing many metaphorical elements. That one can do this seems to count against including metaphor in the category of force.

Now we have outlined the Fregean categories and introduced the problem of where metaphor might fit. In the next section, we will discuss the problem of how metaphor fits into theories of meaning. We will do this first from a Fregean and then a Davidsonian perspective.

Meaning

Whatever meaning is, it is not a thing. Usual ways of understanding what meaning is seem to reflect either an embracing of a literal stance and an avoiding of a metaphorical one, or vice versa. Dummett notes that "many philosophers avoid 'hypostatizing' or 'reifying' meanings—taking meanings to be entities with which words are associated."²¹ This in itself, it should be noted, would be a kind of metaphor in which physical properties are imagined of the concept meaning in order to make the concept (more) understandable to us. Dummett does not find it that important to avoid such hypostatizing, but he follows what has come to be a convention: "to replace an enquiry into

what meaning is by an enquiry into the application or elucidation of certain complex phrases containing the word 'meaning,'" and in this way, "we may ask under what conditions we wish to say that an expression, in particular a sentence, has a meaning or lacks one."²² In other words, in order to avoid a kind of metaphorization of meaning, we have to resort to an adaptation of the context principle in which we can only ask what the referent of "meaning" is in the context of certain complex phrases containing the word "meaning." Such an inquiry is what Dummett calls an inquiry into the nature of significance. With this sort of inquiry, we can settle on a literal meaning for the concept of meaning and prevent metaphorical hypostatizing of it.

Of course, these possibilities for describing the nature of meaning make it difficult to decide whether only literal configurations have meaning or whether metaphors also have meaning because our answer to these questions is going to partially depend on what we think meaning is and how we think it should be represented. For example, we can place literal sentences and metaphorical sentences in opposition and claim meaning for one and not the other. Hence all the disagreements among theorists about which is the "better" representative of language and thought: the metaphorical or the literal. We should observe, however, that in practice everyone takes advantage of the double-edged sword that one can represent thoughts metaphorically or literally, even philosophers. Philosophers, though, for the most part do tend to think of theories of meaning only in literal terms, even though the literal theory may contain central metaphorical models. This means that the fruit of metaphor is enjoyed, but not acknowledged by the theory. That there is a kind of theoretical injustice in this, or at least, that there is a gap between practice and theory, is the kind of point Derrida wants to make.

Some theorists think that to arbitrate between the claims of the literal and the metaphorical to meaning, we have to appeal to a wider system. But let us first turn to the question of how recognizing metaphorical meaning potentially undermines a theory of meaning for a language as a whole. Dummett says that the importance of sense is found "not so much

PHILOSOPHY TODAY

in giving an account of our linguistic practice, but as a means of systematizing it."²³ Positing sense helps us in creating a theory of meaning for a natural language. This is where things become particularly inhospitable to metaphor, for it would seem that metaphor must be excluded in order to preserve the systematic, or compositional view, of language. Thus "the picture of language which Frege employs in discussing sense is that of one in which each logically simple expression of the language is introduced or explained, whether by means of definition or (since it is impossible that every expression be defined) by some other means, in a unique manner, without room for variation."²⁴ This of course is not the road taken by metaphor: variation and a lack of picking out a single referent in a unique way is its province.

For this reason and others, metaphor is relegated to the periphery of Frege's theory of meaning for a language. Metaphor would also have been seen by Frege as part of natural language; therefore it is defective and does not come into formal consideration, yet Frege avails himself of metaphorical concepts in his theory anyway. For instance, Frege's anti-psychologism is sometimes expressed in metaphorical terms. He did not want to think of thought in a purely empirical way. Hans Sluga tells us "that as late as 1918 Frege was to repeat Lotze's sentiments":²⁵

Having impressions is necessary for the seeing of things, but not sufficient. What has to be added is nothing sensory. And nevertheless that is precisely what opens up the world for us; without this non-sensory element everyone would remain locked into his own inner world.²⁶

If we think of metaphor as any concept being illicitly "given" physical qualities, here we see that Frege is against thinking of thought in sensory terms: in other words, he is against psychologistic metaphors. The embarrassment, of course, is that Frege cannot say this without having himself to depend on metaphor. Of necessity, he speaks of the non-sensory in sensory or metaphorical terms. Look at what he says: the "non-sensory element," this is either oxymoronic or metaphorical. It is this non-sensory element that "opens the world for us" for without this non-sensory key, we would be locked up inside our own "inner" world.

Frege replaces the metaphors of psychologism with his own metaphorical web in order to talk about thoughts, meanings, and the relationship of sense to reference. We can see that he, or anyone using natural language, needs either explicit or implicit metaphors to talk about these "things." It is in places like these that it is not clear that all metaphors can simply be translated into literal language and swept under the carpet.

If we try to think only in literal terms, it is clear that thoughts, meanings, and so on do not participate in the physical world in the same way that animals and elements do. Of course, it could be said that these things can be talked about in purely literal terms, but this would seem to be a difficult thing to do. If these necessary metaphors reflect a limitation in our ability to think, or are part of the ground that allows us to think about certain concepts at all, saying that this kind of metaphor is to be included among the "defects" of natural language or that they have no cognitive content is slightly wrong-headed. It may be that metaphors are sometimes a necessary vehicle for grasping a particular thought. Since we are not angels or the kinds of creatures capable of "grasping a thought without the need for any *vehicle* of thought,"²⁷ it might be supposed that we are dependent on our vehicles of thought, however imperfect they are. Also it seems that sometimes in constructing a theory of meaning for language, we have to depend on certain explicit or implicit metaphors. Dummett, for example, says about constructing a theory of meaning:

we do not merely employ the words of our language according to certain patterns, which a theorist could observe from our practice and encapsulate in his theory: we carry with us pictures, often vague but for all that exceedingly compelling, of the kind of pattern which we are observing in our employment of them, that is of the kind of meaning which they have.²⁸

Sometimes, then, we use metaphors as ways of picturing for ourselves what cannot be pictured in any other way. Even philosophers of language who prefer the containment strategy for metaphors such as Frege and Davidson avail themselves of these kinds of metalan-

METAPHOR AND THOUGHT

guage metaphors. It is these kinds of metaphor, the theory-informing metaphors, that are the acid tests for both theories of metaphor and theories of meaning for a language.

Davidson's Theory of Meaning

Before we look at exactly how metaphors cause problems for the Davidsonian account, we will look at a brief account of his theory of meaning. In answering the question of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words, Davidson gives us several reasons for why he thinks that trying to discover the meaning of individual words by assigning something like meaning to them is a futile task. If we try to assign some entity such as meaning to each word, and "we assign Theaetetus to 'Theaetetus' and the property of flying to 'flies' in the sentence 'Theaetetus flies,'" ²⁹ we see that this is not terribly illuminating. Another opaque problem is concatenation or the linking of words. When "viewing concatenation as a significant piece of syntax", that is, when assuming that concatenation is relevant in the explanation of how sentence meanings depend on word meanings, we cannot explain in what way it is relevant. If we assign to concatenation "the relation of participating or instantiating," Davidson tells us that this is the start of an infinite regress. When we come to explain concatenation, we can only say about it that it causes words to have the relation of participating in a sentence, or instantiating a sentence, and if we try to explain this, we have to appeal again to the same relation and so on. In order to avoid this regress, Frege said that "the entities corresponding to predicates (for example) are 'unsaturated' or 'incomplete,' in contrast to the entities that correspond to names." ³⁰ Davidson complains that this move just labels the difficulty without solving it.

Illustrating that we cannot answer our question of how the meaning of the whole depends on the parts, Davidson shows with the example "the father of Annette" that positing an incomplete entity to correspond with "the father of" does no explanatory work. This is especially clear when we look at the individual parts of "the father of." Davidson thinks that we have to construe our demand for a satisfactory theory of meaning differently and not ask for the

meanings of individual words on their own. He substitutes a theory "that entails every sentence of the form 't refers to x' where 't' is replaced by a structural description of a singular term, and 'x' is replaced by that term itself." This has the advantage of avoiding any semantic concept other than "refers to."

If we turn instead to the distinction between reference and meaning, we discover that reference is determined by extra-linguistic facts, whereas meaning is not, and furthermore "the facts can conflate the references of expressions that are not synonymous." ³¹ Since this is the case, in the project of describing how sentence meaning derives from word meaning, we have to start, not with the reference, but rather with the meaning of the parts and this, as Davidson has shown, is not very useful, so we have to take a different tack.

Davidson states that though the concept of meaning has limited uses, "meanings do not seem to . . . oil the wheels of a theory of meaning" ³² when asking that a theory non-trivially give the meaning of every sentence in the language. So because we cannot assume "that parts of sentences have meanings except in the ontologically neutral sense of making a systematic contribution to the meaning of the sentences in which they occur," ³³ Davidson supports a holistic view of meaning. He says that if

sentences depend for their meaning on their structure, and we understand the meaning of each item in the structure only as an abstraction from the totality of sentences in which it features, then we can give the meaning of any sentence (or word) only by giving the meaning of every sentence (and word) in the language. ³⁴

He adds to Frege's idea that only in the context of a sentence does a word have meaning, the dictum: "only in the context of the language does a sentence (and therefore a word) have meaning." This describes, basically, Davidson's holism. He further thinks the most useful way to understand what a word does in a sentence is to look at the systematic contribution that the word makes to a truth theory that generates all of the T sentences for a language.

Before going on to describe such a theory, let us give a brief statement of Davidson's theory of meaning so far: ideally, a literal word has one meaning; individual words make their

contributions to the language as a whole. If we want to know what the meaning of individual words are, then we check the contributions they make to a whole network of related literal sentences. To allow metaphorical meanings, or senses, into this picture seems to mean that we no longer know how we can recognize and depend on literal meanings. To put it metaphorically, to grant words used in a metaphorical way their own "meanings" is to introduce so many wild cards into the game, that the game no longer has enough structure to be played in a sensible way. From Davidson's perspective, there is no metaphorical "meaning" because positing this sort of meaning would interfere with standard, or literal, meaning as he has defined it. The main idea is we cannot simultaneously explain how literal language works and claim that metaphor has metaphorical meaning.

Now we will turn to the role that the T sentences play in Davidson's theory. Since from Davidson's point of view we can find no more help in the meanings of sentences than in meanings of words, he proposes, rather than wrestling with the phrase "means that," we set our hopes on "a theory [that] will have done its work if it provides, for every sentence *s* in the language under study, a matching sentence (to replace '*p*') that, in some way yet to be made clear, 'gives the meaning' of *s*."³⁵ In order to do this, he suggests the mechanism of the Tarski T-sentence: (T) *s* is T if and only if *p*. A theory of meaning for a language *L* requires that "without appeal to any (further) semantical notions it place enough restrictions on the predicate 'is T' to entail all sentences got from schema T when '*s*' is replaced by a structural description of a sentence of *L* and '*p*' by that sentence." The conclusion is "a theory of meaning for a language *L* shows 'how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meaning of words' if it contains a (recursive) definition of truth-in-*L*."³⁶ In other words, by constructing a truth definition, we give a theory of meaning. Meaning is defined if we have a theory which yields T sentences for each sentence of the language.

Using the Tarski theory of truth, Davidson tries to discover how it will yield correct interpretations of statements of a whole language. Since Davidson relies on Tarski's theory of

truth and a theory like this does "require that a relation between entities and expressions be characterized ('satisfaction'),"³⁷ this means that in addition to a coherence theory, in which the T sentences of a language are related to each other, Davidson's theory of meaning also implies a sort of correspondence theory. He says that there is not necessarily a contradiction in holding that a language coheres and that it also corresponds to extra-linguistic facts. As he claims, "if a coherence theory of truth is acceptable, it must be consistent with a correspondence theory."³⁸ In other words, while part of the process of knowing that a sentence is true involves checking the relation of that sentence to other sentences in the language, the correspondence element inherent in the application of the T-sentence means that one must also be able to check outside the language for states of affairs that could make the sentence(s) true.

Now we have briefly described how Davidson characterizes a theory of meaning for the literal sentences in a language, but what about sentences with metaphors? The problem that metaphor poses for a truth-conditional account of meaning is that it undermines the systematic nature of the theory of meaning for the literal sentences. By themselves, the T-sentences are trivial. This has led to complaints that a Tarski truth theory is unilluminating. Davidson's response is that by constructing a systematic theory one comes to show the contribution of individual words. So "the key is in the lock," is true iff the key is in the lock. "The gold key allows us to escape" is true iff the gold key allows us to escape. We have a good idea of what "key" means by examining the literal sentences containing this word and by examining the contribution "key" makes to those sentences. But how then do we treat Frege's sentence "the non-sensory element is a key" iff 'the non-sensory element is a key? What sort of contribution is the word "key" making in this last sentence? Here is another example. Davidson says that:

given a correct epistemology, we can be realists in all departments. We can accept objective truth conditions as the key to meaning, a realist view of truth, and we can insist that knowledge

METAPHOR AND THOUGHT

is of an objective world independent of our thought or language.³⁰

The irony in the use of the word "key" here is only slightly mitigated by the fact that the metaphor of the key is dead as a doornail. Still, the "key to meaning" that Davidson thinks can be found in objective truth conditions is also the very "key" that locks the door against metaphor. In other words, if we understand the meaning of a word through understanding the contribution it makes to all of the literal sentences it is used in, how are we going to understand the meaning of the word when the contribution of the word used metaphorically must also be considered? Another question this raises is when looking at the sentence above, in which there is one word used metaphorically, "key," how do we look at the contributions that the other presumably literal words make to the sentence? Are we to understand the contributions of "we," "can," "accept" . . . differently because the sentence to which these words seem to be contributing some kind of meaning is literally false? Or does this mean we discount the contributions of these words in this, and all the other, literally false sentences?

If we do not fashion some kind of theory to explain how it is we can understand metaphor, Davidson's whole sentence will have to be considered non-sensical. Even if the metaphor is dead as in the "key to meaning," the word "key" here does not have a literal relation to an object, as it does when we hold a real key and say "here is the key," so it looks as though the metaphorical use of the word "key" potentially undermines our understanding of the word used in literal sentences. Davidson does have an answer to this problem. He would say that most of the words in his sentence have simple literal meaning and they therefore can be considered a matter of semantics, but while the one word "key" has its usual literal meaning, there is also a special use of the word, a metaphorical use, and he would say our understanding of this word must depend on unsystematic, pragmatic elements.

If Derrida's idea is that in any case where a word is exchanged for a concept this constitutes a metaphor, this means that Davidson's pragmatic explanation for overt metaphors does not address the covert metaphorical basis

for literal statements. According to Derrida, even a literal statement with no overt metaphors in it is dependent for its existence on the covert metaphor in which a word is exchanged for a concept. That means that "snow is white" is a metaphorical statement because we exchange the word "snow" for the concept we have of snow and so on. To understand metaphor in this way is to render the pragmatic explanation ineffectual because it is meant to account for overt and particular metaphors and not meant to apply to the covert metaphorical basis for literal statements. One may, of course, argue with this understanding of metaphor and one may argue that literal statements do not depend on this deep metaphor, but as it is, the pragmatic explanation does not apply.

We can see that even obvious and particular metaphors are not easily accommodated by Davidson's truth conditional theory of meaning for a language. The truth schema way of envisioning what individual words and sentences mean is supposed to be neutral about reference. As long as one knows under what conditions the sentence would be true, this is supposed to be enough to understand the sentence as having meaning. Of course, those sentences containing metaphor that cannot be directly linked to the external world in a more or less simple fashion pose problems because it is difficult to know under what conditions they could ever be true. This is so especially since "true" is taken to be a sort of relationship between a linguistic representation and an extra-linguistic state of affairs. We can see that metaphors are going to collide with this theory of meaning in the most basic sort of way. When we say these sentences: "the non-sensory element is a key which allows us to escape our inner worlds" or "we can accept objective truth conditions as the key to meaning" are we to examine them for their literal truth conditions and find that they are merely false? How would we check the extra-linguistic world for any clues about whether these sentences are true? But we cannot simply dismiss them, for if these sentences are merely false why did Frege and Davidson bother to write them?

The problem with applying the truth schema to all metaphors is that most metaphors seem to be simply false, so it is not immediately clear within the framework of the truth

schema for literal sentences how metaphors function. Yet metaphors do function in what can only be described as conceptually meaningful ways in spite of the handicap of not having straightforward literal meaning. Moreover, some metaphors are descriptive of conceptual schemes and philosophers do not hesitate to take advantage of this. In view of such philosophical practice, it has to be said that while some metaphors are not true, they are certainly useful in providing a condensed statement of conceptual organization. Examples of this abound. "Coherence theory" or "web of belief" themselves are phrases that have a metaphorical basis. Language and beliefs are not literally snowballs that cohere, nor are they webs of spiders. It may be argued that literal descriptions such as: "s₁, s₂, s₃ . . . are related because they all contain a word y and y makes the same contribution to all of the sentences it may be used in" escape the metaphor of the web or a cohering substance. But while we can assert that metaphors are not independent of the literal, we can also ask are these literal descriptions completely free of the metaphorical models of "coherence" and "web of belief?" Equally, it does not seem likely that the conceptual relationship of correspondence between language and the world can be given in completely literal terms.

How does metaphor fare in this theory of meaning that incorporates coherence and correspondence? Davidson tells us "what brings truth and knowledge together is meaning."⁴⁰ And meanings are given by objective truth conditions. How do we know the conditions are satisfied? Coherence is the test "for judging that objective truth conditions are satisfied."⁴¹ So according to Davidson, in order to secure a theory of meaning for a language, we need central ideas like truth and coherence. Now, it would seem that metaphor has more chance of being understood as a sensible phenomenon, if a coherence theory is emphasized, and less if it is the correspondence theory. That is, on the one hand, perhaps we could see how metaphorical contributions to sentences make sense when we consider all possible sentences with those particular metaphors such as "key" in them. Yet it seems incorrect, on the other hand, to think that a coherence theory that examined the contributions of metaphors would yield a

plausible correspondence theory. Since in Davidson's theory, a coherence theory yields a correspondence theory, it is not clear what the status of metaphor is in such an arrangement. Davidson's idea of metaphor is that it is a "fecund falsity" (not his phrase) and as such does not play an essential part in language because of the way it cannot participate in corresponding to extra-linguistic states of affairs.

As we have seen, though, when we actually look at the theory, there are suspicions that the ideas of coherence, correspondence, and truth, in short, the main elements of this theory, cannot be given except in metaphorical terms. For instance, here is a quick example: Davidson says he does not hope to define truth in terms of coherence and belief. He thinks that "truth is beautifully transparent compared to belief and coherence."⁴² This seems an understandable and reasonable claim to make about truth, but it must be admitted that the sentence "truth is transparent" is itself metaphorical. This metaphor does not exhaust the metaphorical models for truth; it is just one of them. But even asking of this one metaphor, could Davidson have said what he said, metaphorically, in literal terms? If not, why does his theory exclude the cognitive content of metaphor when his theory is, partially at least, organized, informed or even just influenced by metaphors?

Difficult Metaphors

Now we will look, in the Derridean spirit, at two more examples of the kind of difficulty metaphor can pose for the containment strategists. One of the central concerns of modern philosophy of language is to determine how language represents thought and to learn what we can about thought from language. This project has traditionally been framed in literal terms. While sober theorists attempt to show how metaphor can be given a small corner in the theoretical edifice of literal meaning, some theorists such as I. A. Richards and Derrida boldly say that metaphor is thought and furthermore language itself is built upon metaphor. It's an architect's argument about where metaphor fits: is it metaphorical thought or literal thought that is foundational?

The metaphors about language that philosophers themselves use are examples of metaphors that could be thought to be foundational.

METAPHOR AND THOUGHT

Dummett tells us that "Frege uses the metaphor of a route from the name to the referent: names with different senses but the same referent corresponds to different routes leading to the same destination."⁴³ In this case, a metaphor is used because it might be supposed that no literal description can be given. It could be argued that there is no literal fact of the matter concerning this particular relationship between the concept of sense and of reference. Furthermore, it could be argued that this metaphor of routes and destinations either overtly or covertly informs the concepts, literally expressed, of "sense" and "reference." Even though Frege's view of metaphor and language are such that metaphor is held to be easily dispensed with, he uses metaphor to talk about matters that cannot be clarified in any other way. Means, ends (these are Dummett's metaphors); routes, destinations, and possessions (these are Frege's)—are ways of describing the relationship of sense to reference and are entrenched metaphors that would be difficult, if not impossible from Derrida's perspective, to uproot and remove, precisely because, as one might assert, there is no literal way of saying what the metaphors do say about these relationships.

It could be added by a deconstructionist that there is no literal route because by Frege's own lights, there is obviously nothing that could count as a referent for "sense" and there is, less obviously, no referent for "reference." The only referent or destination of "sense" could be a thought, a sense-thought. The only way to prove the existence of such a referent would be along similar lines for the way in which Frege proved the existence of numbers, through something like the context principle. In other words, we can only use language to prove the existence of certain thoughts. When using language in this way to prove the existence of thoughts, it would be difficult to arbitrate between the claims to "existence" of literal thoughts and metaphorical thoughts. Metaphorical thoughts can be said to have as much thought stuff as any literal thought and we find that natural language is the guarantor for both.

The thought that sense is a route and reference is the destination, though literally false, is as valuable as any literal thing that might have been said about sense and reference. It gives us

a concrete picture or word diagram of the concept, even if the picture is in fact false: sense is not literally a route and reference is not literally a destination. If to have literal meaning in Frege's theory of meaning means for words to have literal referents, then these words obviously have none and yet they cannot easily be excluded from his theory. In clarifying the relationship between sense and reference, Frege appeals to another extended metaphor:

Somebody observes the Moon through a telescope. I compare the moon itself to the reference; it is the object of the observation, mediated by the real image projected by the object glass in the interior of the telescope, and by the retinal image of the observer. The former I compare to the sense, the latter is like the idea or experience. The optical image in the telescope is indeed one-sided and dependent upon the standpoint of observation; but it is still objective, inasmuch as it can be used by several observers.⁴⁴

That Frege can use metaphors that have different contents in order to convey the same sorts of ideas about the relationship between sense and reference is no argument against the idea that the relationship needs a metaphorical framework in order to be fleshed out. Both of the metaphors enforce very similar ideas. It is like using two different literal sentences to describe one situation. This does not necessarily discredit either literal sentence, nor does it discredit the general possibility of describing situations in literal terms. Derrida would call these Fregean concepts of the sense (road, telescope) and reference (destination, moon) philosophemes: those philosophical concepts that are irreducibly metaphorical.

Here is another example taken from one of the most sober theorists of metaphor: (the early) Donald Davidson. Davidson takes the containment approach and favors the option of fitting metaphor into a small corner of the literal theory of meaning. But in spite of this, Davidson shows that he has two different understandings of metaphor in his essay "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." On the one hand, he understands that metaphor can be the condensed expression of a whole conceptual scheme—a way of seeing the

world—when he says: “The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox.”⁴⁵ He takes metaphor seriously here because he goes on to substitute a “dominant” metaphor which represents his own conceptual scheme: the common co-ordinate system on which to plot various points.⁴⁶ He bothers to work on various metaphors to get the right one and to argue about the conceptual schemes that each represents. Davidson says that his metaphor of the “common co-ordinate system” is correct, while the opposing metaphor of “different points of view” is incorrect. By trying to show the contradiction at the heart of the metaphor of “different points of view,” this means that he thinks metaphor can be representative of a conceptual scheme that is contradictory and likely to give us an incorrect view of the world. The fact that he is arguing for the right metaphor means that he thinks that it is possible to represent the right conceptual scheme metaphorically.

Davidson recognizes, on the one hand, that metaphors are connected in some way with something as broad as a conceptual scheme or a philosophical position, but he also thinks of metaphor, on the other hand, as merely an imaginative mistake, as something that has no basis in reality. He criticizes Strawson’s notion of pluralities of worlds by saying, “these pluralities are metaphorical or merely imagined.”⁴⁷ In this case “metaphorical” and “merely imagined” seem interchangeable. This is his second understanding of metaphor: that which has no connection with what is, from his point of view, the right conceptual scheme. He teaches us by example that, on the one hand, metaphor can have to do with conceptual schemes, presuppositions, ways of being able to organize and perceive reality at all, but, on the other hand, metaphor may be trivial ornamentation or merely false. Even though Davidson has two different ways of looking at metaphor (in the same essay!), the fact is that he treats a particular metaphor as being representative of a conceptual scheme and in this way he acknowledges that metaphor can be a powerful device of orientation. He points out that a particular metaphor can be a failure if it reflects incorrect conceptual schemes, or it can fail to represent a conceptual scheme accu-

ately, but he also implies that metaphor can succeed in these endeavors as well.

Because it is possible for a metaphor to succeed or fail in its representation of a philosophical position, this means that metaphor as a general phenomenon cannot be dismissed as having no cognitive value whatsoever. Particular metaphors can fail, and particular metaphors can be mere rhetorical ornamentation, but since certain metaphors can be a powerful way of orienting ourselves conceptually, it cannot be said that all metaphors have no cognitive content. Trying to define the cognitive content or substance of metaphor is not without its problems. One of the troubles with trying to come to grips with metaphor in a formal theory is that, since the general phenomenon of metaphor can be at the very least identified with either of the two possibilities—ornament or conceptual orientation—outlined here, it is possible that metaphor is considered to be whatever will fit best with the favored theory. This is partly what Derrida means when he complains that a theory of metaphor is likely to reflect and be limited by a particular philosophical view of language. This is especially evident with the metalanguage metaphors: those metaphors that are involved in a theory of meaning for a language.

An illustration of this difficulty is found when Davidson argues against conceptual relativism by saying that “language is not a screen or filter through which our knowledge of the world must pass.”⁴⁸ We can extract two metaphors from this: “language is a filter” and “language is not a filter.” Davidson is encapsulating his theory of what language is like with the latter metaphor. With this metaphor, he conveys that he thinks language can deliver information about the world to us and it can do so without tampering with it, allowing us to see the world as it is. Language is the transparent mediator. Davidson’s view of language and his theory of what language is, and consequently his theory of what metaphor is, is itself based on, or at least influenced by, this metaphor: language is not a filter. When it comes to making an explicit theory about metaphor, however, Davidson remembers metaphor as the merely false. He operates with a certain conceptual scheme of how language works which does not recognize that metaphor is sometimes

METAPHOR AND THOUGHT

an accurate representative of a correct conceptual scheme even though he himself uses metaphor in this way. Ironically, he has used a metaphor to say that language is not restricted by organizing concepts, or metaphors: "The argument against conceptual relativism shows rather that language is not a screen or filter through which our knowledge of the world must pass."⁴⁹ Language may be as this dominant metaphor implies, but even if language were this way, the theory of what language is like or how language works would still be shaped by this or another particular conceptual organization. Particular conceptual organizations can be represented by metaphors. The idea is that there is no escaping this link between conceptual organization, their dominant metaphors and theories about language.

Thinking of metaphor as a pragmatic use of words might have been compatible with this way of using metaphor, but when Davidson says that metaphor has no cognitive content at all, it makes it difficult to know what he is doing with metaphors in these examples. On the one hand, the question is if it has no cognitive content, why is it his practice to argue about metaphors and use them to further his point? If he uses metaphor as though it does have cognitive content, that renders the pragmatic explanation somewhat superfluous because if metaphor does have cognitive content it must be considered in some cases to be on an equal footing with literal statements.

In order to get a deeper understanding of whether we can separate a metaphor's having

cognitive content from a metaphor's having its own sort of meaning, we have to deal with this complex problem that Derrida has pointed out to us: that even literal statements may be dependent on a metaphorical mechanism. The containment strategists simply state that literal utterances do not depend on metaphor, whereas the foundationalists say that metaphor is the basis for thought and language. The argument that we want to be able to use literal sentences for practical purposes and that we want to be able to understand literal sentences literally is not an argument against the idea that there may be a metaphorical mechanism that pervades all linguistic transactions and upon which we rely in order to make the literal statements in the first place. It may be argued, however, even if it is admitted that literal statements depend in some way on a covert metaphorical operation, the presence of this covert metaphorical operation may not affect our ability to make literal statements. It seems that the containment strategies do not fully address the possibilities presented by the foundational approach, but equally the foundationalists have not presented a convincing argument for the expansive role of metaphor in language, nor have they presented a convincing argument that recognizing the so-called metaphorical basis of language would have any effect on being able to make literal statements.

ENDNOTES

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PHILOSOPHY TODAY

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