

The Baltic International Yearbook of Cognition,  
Logic and Communication

Vol. 3: *A Figure of Speech*

August 2008  
pages 1-20

MARGA REIMER  
The University of Arizona

## METAPHORICAL MEANINGS

*Do You See What I Mean?*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

My intention in this paper is to propose a conception of metaphorical meaning on which the meaning of a metaphor includes propositional as well as non-propositional features. I will make two general claims on behalf of the proposed account: *first*, it is intuitive; *second*, it is of theoretical value. In claiming that the proposed account is of theoretical value, I mean only that its adoption leads to an increased understanding of the nature of metaphor: of metaphorical thought and of metaphorical communication in particular.

Because the proposed account of metaphorical meaning relies heavily on Donald Davidson's (1978) distinction between "seeing as" and "seeing that," let me begin with a discussion of that distinction.

### 2. "SEEING AS" VS. "SEEING THAT"

The distinction between "seeing as" and "seeing that" will be familiar to anyone who is familiar with Davidson's classic paper "What Metaphors Mean" (1978). There, Davidson argues for the thesis that "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (Davidson 1978; 32). In arguing for this claim, Davidson is not simply challenging the view that *words*, used metaphorically, have non-literal meanings. He is also challenging the considerably more modest view that metaphors are associated with non-literal *speaker*

meanings. He explicitly denies that, "associated with a metaphor is a cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message" (Davidson 1978; 46). Davidson's denial is outrageously unintuitive. Surely Ludwig Erhard meant *something* when he declared, "A compromise is the act of dividing a cake in such a way that everyone believes he has the biggest piece." Indeed, there seems to be something profoundly *true* about Erhard's remark. How does Davidson account for this? More generally, how does he account for metaphor's *cognitive effects*, which are at times undeniably powerful?

Davidson doesn't deny the effects; indeed, he *emphasizes* them. He then invokes the distinction between "seeing as" and "seeing that" in order to account for them. This distinction also allows Davidson to explain metaphor's notorious resistance to literal paraphrase. The crucial passage reads as follows:

...if I show you Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit, and say "It's a duck," then with luck you see it as a duck; if I say "It's a rabbit," then you see it as a rabbit. But no proposition expresses what I have led you to see. Perhaps you have come to realize that the drawing can be seen as a duck or as a rabbit. But one could come to know this without ever seeing the drawing as a duck or as a rabbit. Seeing as is not seeing that. Metaphor makes us see one thing as another by making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight. Since in most cases what a metaphor prompts or inspires is not entirely, or even at all, recognition of some truth or fact, the attempt to give literal expression to the content of a metaphor is simply misguided (Davidson 1978; 47).

What is Davidson trying to do here? His central aim is to explain metaphor's cognitive effects, while avoiding commitment to non-literal propositional meanings. Additionally, he aims to explain metaphor's resistance to literal paraphrase. The distinction between "seeing as" and "seeing that" helps Davidson accomplish these goals. He claims that these two types of "seeing" represent different kinds of cognitive states. He emphasizes that "seeing as" does not entail "seeing that." In other words, it is possible to see A as B, without simultaneously seeing (or

believing) that A can be seen as B. This is because “seeing as” is *non-propositional*; “seeing that” is propositional. For now, think of a thought as “propositional” just in case it is truth-evaluable. Then, Davidson’s point can be illustrated as follows. Suppose that you see Wittgenstein’s gestalt image as a duck. You do not *thereby* see that the image can be so seen. In other words, upon seeing the image as a duck, you do not thereby think to yourself: Aha! The image can be seen as a duck. Of course you might think just that, especially if you’ve been trying unsuccessfully for days to see the image as anything other than a rabbit. Moreover, in coming to the realization that the image can be seen as a duck, you would be entertaining a *proposition*, one that is true. You would be entertaining the true proposition that the image can be seen as a duck. Davidson’s point is simply that, in seeing the image as a duck, you *need not* entertain that - or any other - proposition.

Importantly, Davidson also wants to say that it would be possible to believe that the gestalt image can be seen as a duck or as a rabbit, without actually seeing it either way. Suppose you see only the uninspired scrawl of a child. Nevertheless, you believe what the psychology textbook says: this apparent “scrawl” can be seen as a duck; it can also be seen as a rabbit. Thus, propositional belief to the effect that something can be seen in a particular way does not entail that the believer actually see it in that way. Of course, she might; Davidson’s point is that she needn’t. Thus, not only does “seeing as” not entail “seeing that”, “seeing that” (or at least “*believing that*”) does not entail “seeing as.”

Following Davidson, let’s apply the “seeing as”/“seeing that” distinction to the interpretation of metaphor. Consider sentence (1):

- (1) Man is a wolf.

On Davidson’s view, the metaphor “works its wonders” by prompting the interpreter to see man as a wolf. What does such “seeing” involve? On any plausible interpretation of seeing man as a wolf, to see man in this way is to see him as possessing some, but certainly not all, of the traits stereotypically associated with wolves. These traits arguably include treachery and deceit; they do not include possession of a thick gray coat or a tendency to howl on moonlit nights. Thus, suppose that to see man as a wolf is to see him as treacherous and deceitful. It would be a mistake, according to Davidson, to suppose that to see man *as*

a wolf is to see *that* man can be so seen. In other words, the interpreter might see man as a wolf, as treacherous and deceitful, without thereby thinking propositionally to herself: Man can be seen as a wolf, as treacherous and deceitful. Of course, the interpreter might think just that; Davidson’s point is that she needn’t. Moreover, it is also possible to think propositionally to oneself: Man can be seen as a wolf, as treacherous and deceitful, without actually seeing man in this way. This would be analogous to trusting the psychology textbook that the gestalt image can be seen as a rabbit, while only being able to see it as a duck. Perhaps one sees man as basically docile and naive, but has just begun reading a highly recommended book on human nature that begins with the statement: Although you may see man as docile and naive he is, in reality, treacherous and deceitful.

More generally, metaphors work by prompting the interpreter to see one thing *as* another. They do not work by prompting her to see *that* one thing can be seen as another. Thus, they do not work by communicating *propositional* thoughts. Although interpretation of a metaphor might, in some cases, *lead to* propositional thinking, it does not *entail* such thinking. One can therefore account for the cognitive effects of metaphor without having to suppose that metaphors have non-literal propositional meanings. So argues Davidson.<sup>1</sup>

Davidson also believes that the “seeing as”/“seeing that” distinction can be invoked to explain metaphor’s resistance to literal paraphrase. For the visionary thinking involved in seeing one thing as another is not propositional, and so is not amenable to expression in literal language. As Davidson so aptly puts it:

A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture (Davidson 1978; 47).

Now that we have looked at Davidson’s distinction between “seeing as” and “seeing that,” let’s turn to the proposed view.

### 3. A ReVISIONary ACCOUNT OF METAPHORICAL MEANING

The account of metaphorical meaning to be proposed here is an account of *speaker meaning*: of what the metaphor-maker means by her

metaphorical utterance. It can thus be seen as constituting a direct challenge to Davidson's denial that metaphors are associated with "cognitive contents" that their authors wish to convey and that their interpreters must grasp if they are to "get the message." Thus, when I talk in what follows of "metaphorical meanings," these are to be understood as *speaker* meanings, rather than as *word* meanings.

On the proposed view, a metaphor's meaning has propositional as well as non-propositional features. Following Liz Camp (Camp 2006), I will refer to metaphor's non-propositional features as "aspectual." However, it is not my intention to commit myself to anything Camp might say about what she calls "aspectual" thought. I happen to think that "aspectual" is an appropriate label for the sort of thinking that goes on when one sees one thing as another. Importantly, I want to claim, in contrast to Camp, that the aspectual thought prompted by metaphorical interpretation is usefully viewed as essential to metaphorical meaning.

Because there are, on the proposed view, important similarities as well as important differences between literal and metaphorical utterances, I will preface my account of metaphorical utterances with a brief analysis of literal utterances. It is important to keep in mind that when I talk of the "meaning of an utterance," whether literal or metaphorical, I am referring to an *intuitive* conception of utterance meaning. It's the ordinary person's conception of utterance meaning - not the conception of any theorist. On this intuitive conception of utterance meaning, the meaning of an utterance, whether literal or metaphorical, is the "cognitive content" that the speaker "wishes to convey" and that the interpreter must grasp if she is to "get the message." On such a speaker-based conception of utterance meaning, the meaning of an *ironic* utterance of (2):

(2) You have delighted us long enough,

is more like the meaning of a literal utterance of (3):

(3) You have imposed upon us long enough,

than it is like the meaning of a literal utterance of (2).

So much for preliminaries; now for the proposed account, which I'll preface with a quick definition of literal utterance meaning. *The meaning of a literal utterance* is identical to the proposition literally expressed,

and is individuated by its satisfaction conditions. In contrast, *the meaning of a metaphorical utterance* is identical to the conjunction of two thoughts. One thought is the meant aspectual thought, individuated by the interpreter's *satisfaction* of the utterance's associated directive. This is a directive to engage in non-propositional thinking by "seeing" one thing as another. The other thought is the meant proposition, individuated by its satisfaction conditions.

The point of this rather complex analysis of metaphorical meaning is a simple one: I wish to build, not only propositional, but also aspectual, thought into the meaning of a metaphor. In Davidsonian terms, I wish to construe metaphorical meanings as involving, not only "seeing that," but also "seeing as." In more colloquial terms, I wish to construe the meaning of a metaphor as incorporating the "vision" that the metaphor-maker intends to convey.

Before applying the proposed analysis to a couple of examples, let me clarify some of the terminology it employs. "Propositions" are to be understood as abstract entities, individuated by their satisfaction conditions. Propositions include truth-evaluable thoughts, but they also include some thoughts that are not truth-evaluable. The latter include the thoughts communicated by utterances intended to perform non-constative illocutionary acts: questions, commands, promises, and so forth. Because such utterances are not truth-evaluable, I speak of their "satisfaction" conditions, rather than of their truth conditions. The satisfaction conditions of an utterance are, roughly, the conditions that would have to be met if the resultant illocutionary act is to be, as John Austin (1962) says, "felicitous." When the utterance in question is an assertion, its satisfaction conditions are its truth conditions, and it is felicitous just in case it is true. In the case of a directive, such as that issued by an utterance of (4):

(4) Shut the door.

the satisfaction conditions involve, crucially, the audience's compliance with the directive. The directive is "satisfied" only if the audience actually shuts the door in response to the speaker's utterance. Other types of satisfaction conditions are associated with other types of illocutionary acts. For instance, a question is said to be "satisfied" only if the audience responds to it. For the sake of simplicity, the only illocutionary

acts I will discuss in this paper are assertions and directives.

The proposition “literally expressed” by an utterance is a function of the conventional meaning of the words uttered, plus context. There is a great deal of debate over how to construe context when analyzing the content of a literal utterance. Because I wish to side-step this particular debate, I will leave the notion of context unanalyzed. Nothing hinges on my doing so. To say that a thought - whether propositional or aspectual - is “meant” by an utterance is to say, roughly, that it is the intention of the speaker to communicate that thought to the audience by means of her utterance.

Let’s now apply the proposed account to a couple of examples. Consider (5):

- (5) Tree trunks are straws for thirsty leaves and branches.

Let’s contrast a metaphorical utterance of (5) with a literal utterance of (6):

- (6) The water necessary for the leaves and branches of a tree to flourish passes through the tree’s trunk.

On the proposed view, the meaning of a literal utterance of (6) is the proposition literally expressed: The water necessary for the leaves and branches of a tree to flourish passes through the tree’s trunk.

What about the meaning of a metaphorical utterance of (5)? On the proposed view, (5)’s meaning includes any propositions meant by the speaker. It thus arguably includes the proposition literally expressed by (6), or something very close to it. Many sensible philosophers would agree to this. What they might not agree to is the idea that the metaphorical utterance’s meaning includes something *more than* what is specified in (6). It includes, on the proposed view, a *satisfied* directive, the directive to see tree trunks as straws for leaves and branches, and to see the latter as thirsty. In this way, the proposed account of metaphorical meaning captures the intuition that the metaphor-maker is inviting her audience to partake in her vision. She issues her invitation by directing her audience to engage in the aspectual thinking that is constitutive of that vision.

What is it to “see” what the metaphor-maker sees, and intends the interpreter to see as well? To see tree trunks as straws is to see them as

possessing some - but not all - of the properties characteristic of ordinary drinking straws. No doubt, the relevant properties will vary from context to context. In a typical context, to see tree trunks as straws is to see them as conduits for the provision of liquid nourishment; it is not to see them as small, flexible, or plastic, or as commonly used by young children when dining in restaurants. Similar considerations apply to seeing leaves and branches as thirsty. Again, in a typical context, to see leaves and branches as thirsty is to see them as requiring, for their flourishing, the ingestion of liquid nourishment. It is not to see them as having a *conscious* desire for such nourishment; nor is it to see them as experiencing what conscious beings experience when they experience thirst.

Importantly, such *aspectual* thinking does not entail *propositional* thinking. One can see tree trunks as straws for leaves and branches without reflecting on this vision by thinking to oneself: Aha! Tree trunks can be seen as straws for leaves and branches. Internal declarations of this sort might be commonplace in the forced attempts of creative writing students to devise metaphors for their poems. They are far less likely to occur in the ordinary, everyday interpretation of metaphor.

It is not difficult to see why, on the proposed view, metaphors resist literal paraphrase. As Davidson points out, the visionary thinking characteristically prompted by the interpretation of a metaphor is not amenable to expression in literal language. While it is perhaps possible to capture the *propositional* component of a metaphor’s meaning in literal language, the same is not true of the *aspectual* component; hence metaphor’s resistance to literal paraphrase.

Some philosophers, including Ernie Lepore (personal correspondence), have suggested metaphor’s resistance to literal paraphrase is due entirely to an impoverished lexicon and can accordingly be overcome by artificial enrichment of the lexicon. Consider Goneril’s metaphorical utterance of (7):

- (7) Old fools are babes again.

Suppose the meant propositional content includes what is expressed literally by (8):

- (8) Senile dementia involves a regression to infantile behavior.

But suppose that Goneril were to insist that her intended meaning included something more - something for which there is no adequate English expression. Perhaps there was an intention to communicate what the infantile behavior involves: crying, napping, fussing, inarticulate vocalizing, and so forth. Perhaps there was also an intention to communicate the idea that such behavior is associated with a profound helplessness born of a severely limited cognitive capacity.

On Lepore's view, this means only that English, with its current lexicon, is unable to express with precision the propositional thoughts the metaphor-maker intends to communicate. One might, however, create a new English-language predicate *f*, stipulated to capture *precisely* what the speaker means when she says of "old fools" that they are "babes again." Literal expression of the metaphor's meaning would thereby be made possible.

On the proposed view, such lexical enrichment does not entail that metaphorical meanings can be fully captured in literal language. For such language, however lexically enriched, is simply not capable of capturing metaphor's "seeing as" component. For no literal utterance is such that its interpretation *entails* that the interpreter engage in aspectual thinking. For example, there is no literal utterance such that its successful interpretation *entails* that the interpreter see "old fools" as "babes again." What about an utterance of (9):

- (9) Senile dementia involves *f*,

where this is at least roughly equivalent to the considerably more prolix (10):

- (10) Senile dementia involves a regression to infantile behavior: As a result of a severely limited cognitive capacity, victims of senile dementia cry a lot, nap a lot, are easily frustrated, what they say makes little sense, and they are basically helpless.

Even this won't work. For as Davidson suggests in his discussion of the duck-rabbit image, one could grasp the proposition literally expressed by (10), one might even believe it to be true, without thereby seeing victims of senile dementia as having any of the specified properties. Perhaps one's only experience with senile dementia involved a grandmother who spent most of her time joyfully reciting Shakespearean sonnets in a thick Bavarian accent. Thus, while (10) might approximate the

*propositional* content of (7), it does not thereby capture its *aspectual* content.

Here's another analogy that makes the point vivid. Suppose you read Davidson's "What Metaphors Mean" for the first time, and find Davidson's view to be completely crazy. Surprisingly, a guest speaker opens her talk by exclaiming, without irony:

- (11) Davidson's view that metaphors have no non-literal meanings is quite plausible.

You *understand* what the speaker has said; you even *believe* what she has said, for she is a well-respected philosopher of language and of Davidson's work in particular. But you don't, at the moment, see Davidson's view as plausible. You *see* it as crazy, even though you now *believe* it to be plausible. Asked to give your opinion of Davidson's view, you might well respond with a perfectly sincere utterance of (12):

- (12) At the moment, I see it as crazy - but I'm sure the speaker will manage to convince me that it is actually quite plausible.

There is nothing paradoxical about this sort of epistemic situation. Indeed, as I now attempt to articulate my ideas on metaphor, what I say strikes me as plausible. Nevertheless I anticipate that, over time, I might regard much of what I am now saying as somewhat less plausible than I now see it to be. This sort of situation is commonplace, at least among those who reflect, with modesty, on the reliability of their own beliefs. It is as common as acknowledging that reality might not be quite as one takes it to be.

Back now to the claim that aspectual thought is never entailed by the interpretation of a literal utterance. One might question this on the grounds that aspectual thinking is entailed by an understanding of the metaphor's associated directive - a directive amenable to expression in literal language. Thus, metaphorical meanings can indeed be paraphrased in purely literal language. This would be wrong. Consider the directive associated with (1), a directive expressible in literal language as something like: *Try to conceptualize man as a wolf*. One could understand perfectly a literal utterance of this sentence without satisfying it: without actually engaging in aspectual thinking about man qua wolf. One might simply refuse to engage in the relevant sort of thinking. One



might not want to expend the cognitive effort required to ponder relevant similarities between man and wolf. Alternatively, one might simply be unable to satisfy the directive. One might, for instance, be so committed to the idea that man is essentially good, that one is simply unable to see any similarities between man and the stereotypically treacherous and deceitful wolf.

One might think of these latter points in connection with other directives, such as the rather common directive to:

(13) Chill.

You can understand the directive perfectly, know what it would take to satisfy it, and yet refuse to satisfy it by continuing to rant and rave. Alternatively, you might be unable to satisfy it, being in the midst of an acute psychotic episode that robs you of the necessary volitional where-with-all. That doesn't mean you don't *understand* it; you just can't gather the wits required to *follow* it. More generally, there is no literal utterance such that its successful interpretation *entails* that the interpreter engage in any aspectual thinking. This is because, as Davidson puts it, "words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture."

Of course, literal language can *inspire* aspectual thought, as Davidson makes clear in his brief discussion of T. S. Eliot's poem about the Church of England: a poem entitled "The Hippopotamus." The literal language employed in the poem is clearly intended to inspire the interpreter to see the Church of England as a hippopotamus. Nevertheless, interpretation of the poem's literal language does not entail such aspectual thinking. Similarly, suppose I were to say to you:

(14) Drinking tequila always makes me dizzy. That reminds me, I have to prepare a lecture on personal identity tonight.

Successful interpretation of my literal utterance would not require that you see, or even attempt to see, preparing a lecture on personal identity as drinking Tequila. You could successfully interpret my utterance without engaging in any aspectual thinking. Nevertheless, in uttering (14), I might well intend that you make the comparison: that you see, or at least attempt to see, preparing a lecture on personal identity as drinking Tequila. What would such seeing involve? It would no doubt involve seeing the preparation of such a lecture as something likely to cause dizzying mental confusion.

#### 4. SOME VIRTUES OF THE PROPOSED ACCOUNT

So much for the view, let me now turn to its motivation. I certainly don't think that there are any *decisive* arguments for the proposed account, or for its superiority over other accounts. However, it is not without its virtues. I will mention six of these.

**Virtue 1:** The proposed view makes sense of our pre-theoretical thought and talk about metaphor. We often say of metaphorical utterances that they are true or false, where our attributions of truth-value reflect what we take the metaphor-maker to mean by her utterance. This way of talking makes perfect sense on the proposed view, as metaphorical utterances communicate propositions and propositions are often truth-evaluable. It is misguided on Davidson's view to talk this way, as Davidson denies that metaphors have non-literal propositional meanings. We also think of metaphorical utterances as having meanings that are different *in kind* from those of literal utterances. This way of thinking makes sense on the proposed view; for the meanings of metaphorical utterances are partly aspectual; the meanings of literal utterances are not. It is misguided on Searle's (1979) view to think this way, for Searle regards both literal and metaphorical utterances as having purely propositional meanings. Of course, theorists often deny that the way we think and talk reflects the way things are. They are often right to do so. My point here is simply that the proposed view *does* reflect the way we think and talk about metaphor and, pending compelling arguments that show we are somehow misguided, this is surely a good thing. It's called "preserving intuitions."

**Virtue 2:** The proposed view allows for the articulation of two important distinctions among metaphors: the distinction between prosaic and poetic metaphors, and the distinction between living and dead metaphors. Let's begin with the former.

Prosaic metaphors are those that occur in ordinary everyday conversations; poetic metaphors are those that occur in works of poetry. Applying the proposed view to this distinction, we can say the following. Both kinds of metaphor have aspectual as well as propositional features. However, a prosaic metaphor's propositional features are more central

to the speaker's communicative intentions than are its aspectual features. The reverse is true of poetic metaphors. Here, aspectual features are more central. Thus, the proposed view is able to characterize, in an intuitively satisfying way, the distinction between prosaic metaphors like (15):

(15) Time is money.

and poetic metaphors like (16):

(16) He sang his didn't he danced his did.

On Davidson's view, we would have to say that neither metaphor has any meaning other than its literal one. On Searle's (1979) view, we would have to say that the meanings of both metaphors are exhausted by their associated propositional speaker meanings.

What Searle says about both (15) and (16), the proposed view might say about dead metaphors like (17),

(17) She was incensed when denied tenure.

This brings us to the distinction between living and dead metaphors. Dead metaphors are not really metaphors; they are lexically ambiguous expressions that were once used metaphorically. Thus, the verb "to incense" now has two literal meanings: to perfume with incense and to infuriate. It was once used metaphorically to mean to infuriate; this is now one of its literal meanings. Living metaphors, in contrast, are lexically univocal expressions that are typically used non-literally. These are true metaphors. The proposed view would say that (17)'s meaning is *exhausted* by its propositional content. For it has no aspectual content, as it is no longer really a metaphor. Living metaphors, in contrast, have meanings that are partly aspectual. Hence, the intuitive difference between living metaphors like (15) and (16), and dead metaphors like (17).

**Virtue 3:** The proposed view also explains metaphor's notorious resistance to literal paraphrase. According to the proposed view, the interpretation of a literal utterance never entails that the interpreter engage in aspectual thinking. So, no literal paraphrase of a metaphor

will ever capture a metaphor's aspectual component and thus its full meaning; hence metaphor's resistance to literal paraphrase.

One might respond by saying that literal paraphrases of *literal* utterances tend to be just as inadequate as literal paraphrases of metaphorical utterances. One might cite Mark Phelan's (2007) recent experimental study in support of this claim. Yet there is no temptation to conclude that the inadequacy of literal paraphrases of literal language has anything to do with the presence of aspectual meanings. So why think that *metaphor's* resistance to literal paraphrase is suggestive of aspectual meaning? Because, as Phelan's study also suggests, metaphors don't resist *metaphorical* paraphrase as much as they resist *literal* paraphrase. As Phelan (2007) notes, his study suggests that metaphors are often paraphrased with metaphors, and literal sentences are often paraphrased with literal sentences. I agree with Phelan but I am even more impressed with metaphor's amenability to metaphorical paraphrase.

That metaphors are especially amenable to metaphorical paraphrase is no surprise on the proposed view. Surely the best, or at least the most natural, way to paraphrase an utterance with a hybrid meaning is by way of another utterance with a hybrid meaning.

**Virtue 4:** The proposed view is ontologically parsimonious. Metaphorical meanings are different than literal meanings, but there is no violation of Occam's Razor here. Everyone agrees that some thought is propositional, and some thought is not. Metaphorical meanings simply combine these two forms of thought. This combination is not ontologically daring and (as just suggested) appears to have some explanatory value.

Here's an analogy. I tell my daughter that in the 1960's there used to be ice-cream sodas. She says "no way", I must mean ice-cream *sundaes*. Ice cream and soda would taste nasty. I mix some ice cream and soda for her. She loves it and now believes me. The proposed view of metaphorical meaning is just as harmless, ontologically speaking, as an ice-cream soda. All agree that some thought is propositional and some is not. It's no great leap to suppose we might combine these types of thought in language.

Davidson's view is also ontologically parsimonious, as is Searle's. However, it's unintuitive to say with Davidson that metaphors have no

non-literal meanings; it's nearly as unintuitive to say with Searle that there is no difference in kind between literal and metaphorical meanings. My point is that we can reject these unintuitive claims without having to complicate our ontology one iota.

**Virtue 5:** The proposed account of metaphorical meaning allows for an intuitive analysis of cases where a speaker understands a metaphor and yet disagrees with it. Suppose you are talking with a colleague about a philosophy of psychiatry class you are scheduled to teach. The conversation turns to the question of effective treatments for mental illness. You say to her: I have to agree with Aeschylus when he said:

(18) Words are the physicians of the mind diseased.

She responds with:

(19) That's wrong; psychotherapy is useless to the schizophrenic.

You suggest to your friend that perhaps she has misunderstood what Aeschylus meant, maybe he was thinking of ordinary depression rather than psychosis. She replies by insisting

(20) I know just what he meant; he meant that mental illness, broadly conceived, can be treated by talking to the mentally ill patient about her illness. I just don't see mental illness in the way he does: as different *in kind* from bodily illness. I see the two as basically the same, and so as equally resistant to talk therapy, and as equally amenable to drug therapy.

This way of talking makes perfect sense on the proposed view, according to which a metaphor conveys propositional as well as aspectual thoughts. The propositional thoughts are "understood," or not. The aspectual thoughts are "seen," or not. Sometimes, one can understand the former without seeing the latter.

It might appear that this sort of analysis has an unintuitive consequence: whenever the interpreter does not share the metaphor-maker's vision, as in the case just described, we are forced to say that she does not fully *understand* the metaphor. But that doesn't seem right. It seems more natural to say that the interpreter understands the metaphor, she simply disagrees with it.

I agree that we don't want to say that the interpreter lacks understanding in such cases, but why suppose that the proposed view entails that she does? The proposed view entails that the interpreter *understands* what the speaker means in the sense that she grasps the meant proposition(s). It also entails that she doesn't *see* what the speaker means in the sense that she is unable to follow the metaphor's associated directive and to thereby partake in the speaker's vision. This seems quite intuitive. Just consider a metaphor whose presuppositions you don't share. Suppose a well-dressed man, toting what looks to be a Bible, is fast approaching you. You spot the familiar nametag and wave him off, indicating that you are not interested in talking to him. In response, he says to you,

(21) We are all children of God, even those of us who reject him.

He follows this pronouncement with a plaintive utterance of:

(22) Don't you see what I mean?

You might reply that no, you *don't* see what he means - even though you *understand* perfectly the point he is trying to make. In contrast, were he to have asked:

(23) Do you understand what I am saying?

The natural response would be to say "yes, I just don't agree with it." Thus, the unnaturalness of saying that you don't fully understand his metaphor can be softened by saying that while you do in fact "understand" what he means, you nevertheless fail to "see" what he means. In particular, you fail to see people, non-believers in particular, as children of God.

**Virtue 6:** This last virtue is a purely pragmatic one. The proposed account allows for a happy reconciliation of the disagreements among Black (1954), Davidson (1978), and Searle (1979). Black is right in thinking that metaphors have meanings that are different in kind from literal ones. Davidson is right in thinking that metaphors resist literal paraphrase because of their non-propositional cognitive effects. And Searle is right in thinking that metaphors have meanings that are propositional in nature.



## 5. RECONCEPTUALIZING MEANING

In closing, let me respond to two objections to the proposed view, both of which take issue with the attempt to re-conceptualize utterance meaning as potentially aspectual. The objections are, respectively, that the proposed account is *unintuitive* and that it is *incoherent*. Let's begin with the former. Consider the following three directives:

(24) Never fall in love.

(25) Never give your heart away.

(26) Never allow yourself to be smitten.

Intuitively, they all mean the same basic thing. This is just what would be predicted on the Searlean view that meaning is a matter of satisfaction conditions. For all three directives arguably have the very same, literally specifiable, satisfaction condition:

(27) Never become enamored of a lover.

I agree, but believe we can be more precise, and that once we are, the intuitive plausibility of the proposed view is enhanced rather than diminished. Intuitively, (24)-(26) do indeed mean the same *basic* thing; they also mean subtly *different* things. These are my own intuitions, but they are intuitions that receive backing from Phelan's experimental study. That study confirms the view that paraphrases - whether of literal or of metaphorical utterances - are *never* completely adequate. Paraphrases invariably leave something out; saying the very same thing in a different way might be virtually impossible. That is only to be expected given the proposed view that (24)-(26) have subtly different meanings. Importantly, the study also confirms the view that metaphorical paraphrases of metaphors tend to be more adequate than literal paraphrases of metaphors. If we generalize the study's results, we can say the following. (24)-(26) provide better paraphrases of one another than (27) provides of any of them. How is this to be explained on the Searlean view that (27) specifies the meanings of (24)-(26)?

Now let's turn to the claim that the proposed account is incoherent. The account assumes that it makes sense to construe aspectual thoughts

as meanings, as speaker meanings in particular. But this doesn't make any sense: What is "seen," even in a metaphorical sense, cannot be meant. To say what can be "seen" can be meant is what is known as a category mistake. It's as confused as saying that numbers have shapes; what have shapes are numerals, not numbers.

I would agree, but only insofar as one is using "meaning" in a *theoretical* sense, specifically, in a sense in which locutions of the form "S means \_\_\_\_\_" are ill-formed whenever the blank is filled in with something other than a proposition. However, in that case, the objection is question-begging. Indeed, aspectual meanings make perfect sense given our pre-theoretical conception of meaning. Consider the metaphor-maker's question: *Do you see what I mean?* Surely, this is a well-formed question, at least when the verb is interpreted metaphorically. The implication is clear: What is seen can be meant. It might be objected that "seeing" is just a metaphor for understanding. To see what someone means is nothing more nor less than to understand the proposition(s) they have communicated. However, although "seeing" might sometimes be used as a metaphor for propositional understanding, this is not always the case. When the philosophically-minded math teacher says to her pupil: *Do you see what Schopenhauer meant when he said:*

(28) A geometrical proof is a mousetrap.

she is not asking whether the pupil *understands* what the relevant similarities are, she is asking whether he can *see those similarities for himself*. She is asking, in other words, whether he sees the rationale behind the remark.

Here's another example that makes the same point. Suppose a critic says:

(29) Tolstoy was a great moralizing infant.

You respond with:

(30) I see just what that critic meant.

You are not saying merely that you *understand*, that you comprehend, what he meant - that Tolstoy was an immature man with a morally superior attitude. You are not merely saying that you *believe* it. You are

saying that you *see* it: that you see Tolstoy as a great moralizing infant: as an immature man with a morally superior attitude. To see Tolstoy in such a way might lead naturally, if not logically, to the belief that this vision is an accurate one. Thus, although “seeing” is not *identical to* believing, it might lead naturally to it.

In sum, the objection from incoherence is worse than question-begging; it is positively stultifying and calls to mind the following sort of argument: Heat cannot be energy. It’s a fluid, everyone knows that. In fact it’s worse than false to say that heat is energy. It’s ungrammatical! These are the same narrow-minded theorists who rejected materialism on the grounds that thoughts, being immaterial, could not possibly be material. Meanings, I have been trying to argue, are usefully regarded as potentially aspectual. That such a supposition is incoherent given a certain conception of meaning, may only tell against the usefulness of that conception.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> However, a potential worry remains. It is not obvious why “seeing as” must be thought of as non-propositional. If I see a thing as a squirrel, then the proposition I am considering could be said to be “that is a squirrel,” even if I don’t believe it, perhaps because of bad lighting conditions. Perhaps seeing a thing as a squirrel needn’t involve contemplating the more complex proposition, “that thing can be seen as a squirrel,” but nothing said thus far rules out the idea that such seeing involves contemplating (something like) “That is a squirrel.” Thanks to Andrew D. Spear for both the point and the illustration. My tentative reaction to this interesting point is that it may entail multiplying entertained propositions beyond plausibility. Suppose that identifying something as a particular type of thing (such as a squirrel) involves entertaining (without necessarily endorsing) the thought: “That is a such-and-such.” In that case, it seems likely that not only humans, but also other non-human animals (such as cats and dogs), entertain innumerable propositions each and every day. Even if we restrict the point to humans, issues of plausibility arise. Is it plausible to suppose that, as I sit down at my computer, recognizing it as such, I think to myself: “this is my computer”? Clearly, more needs to be said before the issue can be settled.

### References

- Austin, J. 1962. *How to do Things with Words*. London: Oxford University Press.  
 Black, M. 1954. *Models and Metaphor*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.  
 Camp, E. 2006. Metaphor and that certain “je ne sais quoi”. *Philosophical Studies* 129:1–25.

- Davidson, D. 1978. What metaphors mean. *Critical Inquiry* 5(1):31–47.  
 Phelan, M. 2007. The inadequacy of paraphrase is the dogma of metaphor (ms).  
 Searle, J. 1979. *Expression and Meaning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.